

A Patchwork Quilt (or Arabella's Grand Adventure)

Disclaimer: I don't own anything in the Harry Potter world or anything else that may seem familiar. I don't own anything at all.

Author: written by DracaDelirus

Dedication: for 'Mom' aka 'Mrs. Arabella Doreen Figg', for all you have done for me. It doesn't even begin to repay but it's a start, a HP version of our bicycle adventure. I'll always remember, and thank you from the bottom of my heart and Happy Mother's Day!

Explanation: Mrs. Figg said that all the little stories were quite nice but that it was just too bad Arabella wasn't in any of them. Mrs. Figg likes Arabella a lot :) So since I wanted to write something for Mrs. Figg for Mother's Day, and Mrs. Figg was wishing for Arabella, and I didn't think it would fit to do Arabella after the other ones, I set this one in the Spring before the Christmas Angel one – so when Harry was eight instead of nine. So since this story is really a prequel to the rest that I already posted, I put it first instead of last. And I know the poem isn't a wish like the other ones, but in its own way – it is. (Apologies again if I posted this the wrong way, and if this is against any FF rules please let me know so that I can fix it.)

Special Message: thank you annajesse65230 for your suggestions! :)

My Teacher

She taught me as much as she could cram
Into my head, until it swam
She taught me that there is more to me
Than I ever thought there could ever be

Upon her model I just have to look
To learn more than from a "How-To" book
She showed me through her example
"How-To-Survive-Life" lessons ample

She taught me that when empathy blooms

In your heart you can always find room
She taught me that if you just believe
There's hope for even someone like me

She taught me that family is defined
By your heart and not by your mind
My teacher, my confidant, my friend,
She taught me that a broken soul can mend

She taught me lessons I needed to learn
With kindness, affection, and concern
And with her loving strength of will
My Mom is teaching me ever still

- Happy Mother's Day!-
DracaDelirus

PatchworkQuiltPatchworkQuiltliuQkrowhctaPtliuQkrowhctaP

"Ugh! Gerroff me!" Harry's muffled shouts could be heard coming from underneath the hulking lump that was his cousin Dudley. Dudley, grinning from ear to ear, totally ignored the plea until his mother poked her head out his upstairs bedroom window.

"Dudley! What's keeping you?" she called down to him and then seeing what was happening below, screeched in horror, "You! You ungrateful little freak! Get back to work and let go of my precious angel! Diddydums get away from him right now, or he might make you ill. You never know where he might have been," she added disdainfully. "You don't want to catch something right as we are leaving for Holiday do you? Now come up and see if I left anything out. I can run to the store and buy you another suitcase if you want to take anything else."

"It's all Harry's fault! He was trying to touch my bike again." Dudley answered back automatically, thumping Harry one last time on the head before doing as his mother asked.

“Too bad you can’t come too. I could’ve had a lot of fun burying you in the sand. I might have even left your head out if you begged me real nice.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you would have Dud, if you could have figured out how to use the shovel.” Harry retorted under his breath to Dudley’s retreating back. He found out long ago that if he was going to talk back to any of the Dursleys that it was much better to do it quietly enough so that they couldn’t hear him. And calling Dudley ‘Dud’ was about as rebellious as Harry felt it safe enough to go still being within arms reach. However, it wasn’t without its own small satisfaction when he did, as Dudley hated being called ‘a dud’. He took it as a personal affront to his intelligence. He hated it even more than all the sickening sweet babyish nicknames his mother called him.

“Whad’ you call me?” Dudley looked back threateningly.

“I didn’t call you anything, I said... I’m sure you’ll have fun. And I’m sorry if I caused you any trouble.”

“Okay then, just quit touching my stuff.” Dudley begrudgingly accepted the apology and then at his mother’s repeated calls, went into the house slamming the screen door behind him, leaving Harry alone in the garden.

“And you –,” Aunt Petunia stuck her head back out and yelled shrilly at Harry. “Why haven’t you finished cutting the grass young man? You’re lazy that’s why! You’ve had an hour! And pack the suitcases in the car! What are you waiting for? Hurry up now! You’re making us late! And don’t forget to bring my precious angel a snack. He’s looking a might peckish. You’ve probably contaminated him.”

“Yes, ma’am. Right now, ma’am. Sorry, ma’am. Didn’t mean to breath, ma’am.” Harry muttered as he started rolling the push mower over the lawn. His relatives were getting ready to leave on a family holiday to the seashore, and one thing after another had delayed them, with the blame for all the delays being placed squarely on his thin shoulders.

Apparently, he had super powers of which he knew not, because according to his uncle he had the super power to redirect electricity

with mere thought, causing all the alarm clocks to malfunction while he remained locked in his cupboard under the stairs. And according to his aunt, he had the super strength of ten men because he was able to hold Dudley down, and so preventing him from helping with the packing, while Dudley was sitting on top of him. Neat trick.

But right now Harry just wished he had the super power to make them finish packing and then go. Go far far away, and not come back. It wasn't that he didn't want a family. He wished more than anything in the world that he had one, but the Dursleys had made it abundantly clear that they would never welcome him as part of theirs.

Harry didn't think it was too much to ask for at least one person in the world to care about him just a little. He supposed that he did have that, though not in the normal way. But then when had his life ever been normal? He did have to admit that his aunt was terribly concerned about him. Only Harry knew it was that wasn't his welfare about which she was terribly concerned. She wasn't worried that he might starve, locked up in his cupboard alone while they were gone on holiday, or that if the house burned down that he wouldn't be able to escape to safety. If that were a worry at all, she wouldn't have let Uncle Vernon repeatedly lock him in before while they were out. No, she was worried that he would use his super powers to somehow free himself, and be set loose to rifle through her dainties, break all of Dudley's toys, well the ones that Dudley hadn't already broken his self, and then run amok in the pantry eating them out of house and home. Oh yes, she was terribly concerned about him.

Harry was just grateful that all this terrible concern made his Aunt finally decided against her usual remedy for his unruliness, of a second lock on his cupboard door, in favor of pressing him upon an unsuspecting neighbor to look after instead. From experience, he knew he could handle one or two days in his cupboard when forced to, but a whole week? One of his greatest fears was being locked in his cupboard and then forgotten and left to die. So as the option of actually taking him with them to the seashore had never even crossed the Dursley's minds, then in Harry's book, staying at Mrs. Figg's was a million times better than the only other alternative, even if Mrs. Figg was a little strange, and her house smelled of cats.

After Harry finished cutting the grass, he pushed the mower back into the shed and looked longingly one more time at the shiny red bicycle hanging from hooks high up on the wall. It was calling to him, almost as if it were alive. It needed to be ridden as much as he needed to ride it. It wanted him to ride it. It was almost demanding that he ride it. When he jumped real high, he could touch the tires. Sadly, he turned his back on it, tried to shut its pleading calls out of his mind, and closed the shed door. Going round to the front, he started loading the Dursley's suitcases into the boot of the car. When he ran out of room, he tied the remainder on top. The way they packed you'd have thought they were going to be gone a month instead of just a week. Dudley had five suitcases just for his toys.

Up two streets and around the corner Arabella Doreen Figg put down her tea cup. Stroking her cat Tufty, who was curled up comfortably in her lap, she sighed to herself. She had been stuck in Little Whinging for seven and a half years now, three quarters of a decade. Not that she really minded, after all it was a super secret important job she was doing for Albus Dumbledore, she just wished it were a little less super secret so that she could brag about it a little. Every spring when she went home for a visit, her brothers were all 'poor little Arabella this' and 'poor little Arabella that'. Poor little mousy Arabella, the squib who received barely enough magic to see what she was missing out on, but not enough to do anything about it.

Since they were children, her brothers would go off on grand magical adventures that never included her. After they grew into adults, their bragging was even worse. They were so full of themselves that it was a wonder she wasn't as bitter as Petunia Dursley.

Petunia and Arabella shared similar childhood experiences only in Petunia's case it was her younger sister Lily born with magic into a previously all muggle home, instead of, as in Arabella's case, the only one born virtually without magic into an all magic household. She and Petunia, so similar, and yet complete opposites in every way.

This year when Arabella went home for her visit, she wanted it to be different. She didn't want to spend her visit, listening to stories of their adventures while they gave her condescending looks of pity. She wanted an adventure of her own of which to brag. But once again, all

she had done was raise her cats, and spy on her neighbors. The first activity, cross breeding Kneazles, her brothers could care less about, the last, being a spy for Albus Dumbledore - Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorcerer, Supreme Mugwump, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Founder of the Order of the Phoenix, and best of all Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the prestigious school her brothers had attended, a person that they both admired with reverence and awe, her 'boss' to whom she had sworn to keep the secret – would make her brothers drop dead jealous of her, but she couldn't say a word. Rats!

Normally every year during this week of May Arabella went back to Hogsmeade for her family visit, but this year, not so regrettably considering her current mood, she had to postpone. Instead, she was going to be watching the Dursley's nephew, Harry Potter, while they took their son Dudley to the seashore for holiday. The Dursleys said they didn't want to ruin 'ickle' Dudley's trip by having his ill-tempered cousin tagging along. They claimed that Harry had fussed that he didn't want to go, and had pleaded to be left behind with the crazy cat lady.

There wasn't a lot for an eight-almost-nine-year-old to do at her house, other than look at photo albums of her cats, so to choose staying with her over a holiday at the seashore – Arabella had to wonder. What sane child would do that? However, when she really thought about it she couldn't blame Harry for his choice. His relatives really were the worst sort of muggles imaginable, and weren't terribly terrific to have as neighbors either. They were always complaining about something, usually about Harry or about her cats. But as watching out for Harry was the super secret mission she was doing for Dumbledore, she couldn't very well say 'no' to any opportunity to watch him up close and personal, however unexpected it might be.

And it was unexpected. The Dursleys had never left Harry with her for an entire week before. In fact it was only once a year, on Dudley's birthday, that they ever left him with anyone. Petunia said she only did on those occasions because Harry was a very jealous boy, and she didn't want him throwing a fit over the attention Dudley received, and spoiling the party for her son. But Arabella had no doubt that it was Dudley who would throw the temper tantrum, if his cousin were

to be included, not Harry. It seemed as if Petunia had passed on the prejudice she felt for her younger sister Lily to her son, and now Dudley treated his younger cousin in the same contemptuous manner.

Arabella also realized that Petunia had little regard for her personally, and that she considered making Harry stay with her, instead of including him in Dudley's birthday party, as a punishment for the little boy. From the few hours each year that she had Harry alone, and could observe him in an unguarded moment, she also suspected that Petunia feared leaving him with anyone else in case he 'talked' about how they were neglecting him to someone that the muggle authorities would actually take seriously. Petunia needn't have worried in that regard. Even though Arabella prodded and pushed, and gave Harry every opportunity, she couldn't get him to admit a thing. He never complained. Not once.

She also knew that she had the reputation around the neighborhood of being a trifle balmy. Arabella even prided herself on the eccentric 'cover' she had built for her super secret mission. Growing up she had noticed people tended to purposely ignore those who were 'different', so she went out of her way to appear daft and peculiar at every opportunity, even to the point of wearing her carpet slippers to shop at the corner store. What better cover to nose about, than to be someone that everyone avoided? It was no wonder that now Petunia considered her little threat to the Dursley's reputation and good standing in the community. If it came down to it, with Harry not talking, it would be her word against theirs, and they would win.

No one would believe the neighborhood-crazy-cat-lady that Harry was being mistreated. That was one thing that she hadn't considered when choosing her super secret cover story, because it never occurred to her at the time that Harry Potter's relatives would be anything but loving to such a sweet baby. She thought it was just the threats from outside Number 4 Privet Lane from which she would need to be on guard. She never thought the greater threat might be from within. But that was before she moved into the neighborhood and got to know them for the truly dreadful people they were.

So when the Dursley's called her at the last minute to ask if she could watch Harry for them, even though they must have known for weeks

ahead of time that they would need a sitter, she set aside her own plans and prepared the guest room for him. It wasn't very lavish, but she gave it a quick once over with the duster and fluffed up a pillow. Taking an appraising look around her at the somewhat spartan room, she noted that there was still a slight chill to the air. Harry would need a quilt. She sighed and pulled a quilt out of the trunk to air out on the clothes line before putting it on the bed. It was a pretty patchwork quilt, a simple nine patch pattern set on point, made up of delicate cotton prints.

Fingering the stitching she thought back to when she had been given it many years ago. That was almost ten years before, and she had never used it. At the time, the reason it had been given to her had made her angry, even though she knew it was meant to do the exact opposite. Ten years ago, her husband, her Angus had been killed in the war against the Dark Lord. He was a muggle, he wasn't even part of the war, but Death Eaters had slaughtered him anyway, simply because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. She lost her strong, gentle, loving Angus, and in his place, she was given a quilt, as if it could keep her warm in his place.

She had kept it only because it had been made with the best of intentions, and with abundant love, by several of the members of the fledgling Order of the Phoenix at Molly Weasley's suggestion. Among the ones who helped Molly worked on it was a lovely young newlywed named, Lily Potter. To honor Angus, it had made entirely by hand the muggle way. It was ironic that Lily had been part of its creation so long ago to help her through her grief, and now instead, it would keep Lily's own son warm under her roof.

Finishing up the room, Arabella had some more tea to calm her nerves. She and Angus had never had children and now she was wondering what in the world to do with the little boy for an entire week to keep him entertained. Petunia had said that he didn't need entertained, and that he was to do chores and to be 'helpful'. While Petunia was telling her this, Arabella nodded, but silently disagreed. She thought about going out and buying some games or toys for him, but she was afraid to make it too much fun, for fear that Petunia may decide that staying with her was no longer a punishment and so

never let him do it again. Even though it was only for a few hours once a year, Arabella always felt relieved when Harry showed up at her door. It was the only time she was absolutely sure he was still alive and reasonably in one piece. And during those few hours she did her best to undue the three hundred and sixty four days and eighteen hours of damage that living with the Dursley's had done the since the last time she had him.

Getting up, Arabella went to the sink to wash out her tea cup, but as she reached to turn on the tap, she noticed the unusual pattern in the bottom. The tea leaves formed spokes radiating out from the center. Mesmerized by the image it almost looked as though the wheel was starting to turn when the doorbell rang. Startled, Arabella almost dropped the fragile cup. Her heart beating fast she put it down and went to answer the door. Her young houseguest had finally arrived on her doorstep, out of breath, sweaty, grass stains on his knees, and with a small brown paper bag clutched in his hands.

"Sorry I'm late Mrs. Figg. Dudley sneezed so Aunt Petunia had to take him to the doctor before they left," he explained in a rush.

"Was he sick?" she asked opening the door to let him in as the beat of her heart slowed down again.

"No." Harry smirked a little before trying to hide it, "I put pepper on his biscuits and he inhaled them so fast he didn't notice, except for the sneezing fit."

"You know that was wrong, don't you?"

"Yes ma'am." Harry nodded guiltily.

"Don't you remember what I told you last year?"

"The pepper goes in the tea."

"That's my boy. Get it right the next time. Any prank worth doing, is worth being noticed."

“Yes ma’am!” Harry grinned, a warm feeling washing over him at being called ‘my boy’.

“Did you bring your pyjamas and toothbrush? I don’t see a suitcase, is it on the porch?”

“Oh, no ma’am.” Harry laughed at the thought of owning a suitcase, let alone owning anything to pack in it. “I have it all right here,” he said holding up the small grease stained sack. He had packed a second overly large t-shirt castoff of Dudley’s to sleep in, and a used toothbrush salvaged from the trash bin.

“Well, that’s alright then I guess. Why don’t you put your things away in the guest room, while I heat us up a bite to eat? It’s the second door on the right. Arabella smiled at Harry as he scampered off to find the room and then glowered at an imaginary Petunia the second he was out of sight. Returning to the kitchen she rinsed the cup, set it to dry, and made a fateful decision.

“It’s just not right how they treat him.” She told her audience of cats with a edge of determination in her voice, and they meowed in agreement. “And it’s not right they didn’t take him on holiday. What that boy needs is an adventure.”

When Harry came back a scant few minutes later, his big green eyes were glowing brightly.

“Do I really get to stay in that wonderful room?” Harry breathed in awe.

It was a nice enough guest room, a little small and a little plain perhaps, but clean. However, for the life of her Arabella couldn’t remember anything especially ‘wonderful’ about it except for the pretty quilt. And it was doubtful that a little boy would notice such a thing. “Yes you do, consider it yours for the week, and any other time you stay here as well.” Arabella added and was rewarded to see the boy’s eyes grow even brighter.

“Wow!”

"You know Harry, I've been thinking – we have a whole week stretching out in front of us, a week just itching for something exciting to happen. But I do have a ton of chores I should be doing that your aunt said you would help me with; dusting, cleaning, sorting, organizing, vacuuming, and all the cats need a bath. But your family is off on a holiday adventure and it seems to me that you deserve one too. I need help deciding what to do, and since you're going to be here for a while I think you should have a say."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. So, what do you think we should do about it? Should we be responsible, and do chores? Or should we be carefree, and have an adventure?"

"Well..." Harry considered the options carefully, "...dusting and all that stuff could wait, after all if we do it now, we'll just have to do it again later. Dust just keeps coming back you know," he observed wisely from obvious experience, "and I don't think those cats really like taking baths. I think they would prefer it if we skipped that chore all together..."

"Carefree adventure it is!" Arabella said gleefully sweeping her cat Tibbles off the table and picking up the local newspaper. Flipping through it for inspiration of an adventure worthy of their playing hooky from responsibility, a small ad caught her eye and Arabella chuckled with delight. It was as if the tea leaves had left her a sign prophesying that fate was about to knock at her door in the guise of an eight-almost-nine-year-old boy. "This is just the ticket! And I believe my boss owes me at least one bonus after seven almost eight years with no pay raise. Poor man, so busy, so forgetful - tsk, tsk, it's utterly shameful. Well, I'll just help him out and send him the bill without bothering him."

"What is it?" Harry asked, standing on tip toe while trying to peer over her shoulder.

"Tell me Harry, do you know how to ride a bicycle?"

“No. But Dudley got one for Christmas from Father Christmas, a red one. It was really nice.” Harry said wistfully. “He even said I could have a turn after he got tired of it, but when Uncle Vernon was teaching him how to ride it, the wheel bent, so I never got to try.”

“A bent wheel? That ought to have been fixable.”

“Oh it is, but Dudley said he didn’t care to ride it anymore, so Uncle Vernon didn’t have it fixed. I look at it sometimes, and I asked if I could try and fix it myself, but Uncle Vernon said I already did enough damage.”

“Damage?”

“Yeah. It was my fault it got bent to begin with. Uncle Vernon said I looked at Dudley funny when he was riding on it and made him tumble. So now it just hangs on the shed wall above the mower, where Dudley can see it if he wants too.”

“Hrumph!” Arabella gave out an unladylike snort. She knew from her spying that Dudley seldom, if ever, went into the shed, and it was only Harry who ever cut the Dursley’s grass. Vernon probably mounted it there just to taunt Harry because he would have to see it every time he got out the mower. “Odds are it was Dudley’s own weight that bent it. But I think we can remedy that first thing in the morning. Right now however, it is getting late, time for supper and bed.”

After a nice supper of soup and sandwiches, Arabella showed Harry all the new cat pictures she had taken during the past months before sending him off to take a bath and go to bed. Arabella thought that Harry seemed all too excited about going to bed for an eight-almost-nine-year-old. Didn’t they normally fight to stay up past their bedtime? What in the world could be so exciting about the old four-poster bed, with its lumpy old mattress, for a boy his age?

Arabella was still wondering about it when she got up the next morning. Harry was already up. He had fed the cats and had breakfast on the table before she had even shuffled out to the kitchen. The smell of bacon sizzling had roused her out of her slumbers, but when she asked Harry why he was up at six a.m., all he did was

apologize for having a sleep in, claiming that the bed was just too comfortable to get up at five.

Arabella pried her eyelids open while sipping on some hot tea and tried to process that information. No, still didn't make sense. Neither did a young boy cooking breakfast by his self, but she supposed that was one of the things that his Aunt had told him he was to do to make him self useful while he was staying with her, but he seemed so proficient at it...

She shook her head at the troubling thought and focused on Harry instead. Now that she was up, she was intent on starting their adventure. Even though it was so early that not even the stray cats were out, Arabella braved the trek to her ramshackle shed and started searching the rafters with the help of Harry, who was holding the sputtering flashlight. In a dark desolate corner behind the discarded tiki torches, and several boxes of abandoned home improvement projects, she finally spotted what she was looking for.

In her haste to capture her quarry, before it slipped away once more into the darkness, Arabella built a makeshift ladder out of boards laid across a few suspiciously un-ladder-worthy old boxes. Stupidly proud of her ingenuity, Arabella balanced precariously atop the pile on tip toe, and reached out for her treasure, while Harry watched her acrobatics with amazement.

"Careful, Mrs. Figg! Be careful!"

"Aha! I got it!" Arabella made a grasp for the prize and caught hold just as the makeshift ladder did just that - shifted. With pure dumb luck Arabella landed on both feet still clutching the prize, the handle bars attached to a beautiful sparkling baby blue bicycle ...well what used to be beautiful, sparkling, and baby blue ...it was now more rusty, dusty and musty.

"Ooo, I guess three quarters of a decade in the rafters didn't exactly keep Baby Blue in tip top condition." Undeterred from her adventure plans Arabella lowered the bicycle down for closer inspection. "Okay, it looks as if the tires might have dry rot, the chain is rusted, the basket is falling apart, the reflectors are missing, and hm....it seems

to be a little...bent. Well as I said before Harry, bent can be fixed. It just needs a little patching back together, but all in all, not too bad! What do you think?"

"Er..." Harry looked back and forth between the rusted lump of metal and Arabella's hopeful face and finally choked out a "...it's brilliant."

"Yes it is, isn't it?" she agreed with satisfaction.

Harry was just glad Mrs. Figg's question was rhetorical, and that she really wasn't expecting any further agreement on his part, because right now he was having serious doubts about her sanity.

After Harry helped her load the bicycle into the back of her derelict station wagon, Arabella went back inside her cottage and ripped the ad out of the paper that she had spotted the night before.

"This does look promising", she mused, "Bob's Bike Shop is having a spring tune-up special. And Bob says he works on all makes and models of bikes and has been in business for quite a while. And look Harry - a coupon! I just hope Bob is open early!" Forever the optimist Arabella herded Harry into the wagon, and after a quick stop at the Dursley's to add the bent red bicycle to the boot, with an encore performance of her acrobatics, they headed to the outskirts of Little Whinging to find Bob.

Pulling up to the address listed in the ad, Arabella rechecked the street number, and then rechecked again, "Well Harry this is it, and it seems to be open."

"Are you sure this is the right address Mrs. Figg?" Harry asked a bit doubtfully looking at the seedy establishment with concern.

"Yes, I'm sure. This is it. Come on. Help me get the bicycles out of the boot." As she and Harry were trying to wrestle the second obstinate bicycle out of the boot, a couple of scary looking bikers came up behind them. They took over and hefted out the decrepit rusty bicycle, setting it down on its two very flat tires, leaving Harry speechless and Arabella enchanted.

“There you go miss, have a nice day,” one of them addressed Arabella, and then with a not too subtle roar from their dual exhausts, her two knights in black leather and chains, with skulls emblazoned across the back, revved their engines, saluted their fellow adventure seekers and headed toward the rising sun.

Pushing the bicycles past the rows of gleaming motorcycles lined up in front of the shop, Arabella and Harry entered the shop and searched until they found Bob. Bob was engrossed with taking apart an engine while entertaining a few biker buddies with some colorful anecdotes. They knew it was Bob because he had ‘Bad Boy Bob’ tattooed in flames on his well muscled bicep.

Bob was an imposing looking man. He was very tall, wide, bald, and with not just a few tattoos - his took body art to a whole new level. Noticing the new customers Bob stared for a few minutes at Arabella as if she had gone mental, as she looked extremely out of place in her housecoat and carpet slippers. Finally he asked, “what’cha want?”

“I have a coupon from your ad in the daily paper and it says you work on all makes and models. We were wondering - can you fix our bicycles?” Arabella just stood there ginning inanely at Bad Boy Bob, and after a few minutes of disbelief, Bad Boy Bob grinned back at the ridiculous request.

“Sure, why not?” he laughed, “come back tomorrow. They should be done.” Arabella was confident that Bob certainly looked like he knew his way around a bike. So she left Baby Blue and Ruby Red in his tender loving care, and anticipating the ‘morrow, left the shop with a dazed Harry in tow as she hummed the Cindy Lauper tune ‘I’ve got a brand new pair of roller skates...’

The next morning dawned fraught with the promise of adventure. Beautiful blue skies, fluffy white clouds, a gentle breeze and a balmy sixty-two degrees. Arabella was practically giddy as she and Harry headed for Bob’s to pick up Baby Blue and Ruby Red.

True to his word Bob had unbent Ruby Red, and had unbent, derusted, oiled, lubricated, and then not only installed new tires, but also

replaced the seat, peddles, reflectors, basket, and polished up Baby Blue until he gleamed. All that was missing was a jaunty bell and a playing card pinned to the spokes. It was again the sparkling baby blue bicycle Arabella remembered from long ago. He fairly shone as he stood proudly next to Ruby Red, in the midst of all those black and chrome Harleys.

“oughter to wear a helmet.” Bob said hefting the bikes into the boot of Arabella’s wagon. “course I don’t sell Bicycle helmets here. But you two definitely ‘oughter get ‘em.” He nodded after giving Arabella and Harry a speculative glance.

“Don’t you worry Bob, I’ll make sure Harry has one, and I’ll be fine.” Arabella assured him as she lovingly stroked the now shiny bicycle. “I’m not going to ride it far and I don’t plan on any spills.”

“Just takes one to make it worth it.” Bob replied sagely.

Back at home, they left the bicycles on the car park and went into the kitchen for an early lunch. As they munched on bacon and tomato sandwiches Arabella could see the bikes beckoning them from where they left them parked on the drive. Their gleaming spokes sparkling in the late morning sun.

“I have laundry to do but as you said about dusting, if I do it now, it will just get dirty and need to be done again. I guess just one little spin down the lane wouldn’t take too much time. Shall we go?”

“YES MA’AM!” Harry shouted happily, jumping up and starting for the door. He couldn’t wait to ride the beautiful red bicycle. It was what he had asked Father Christmas for last year, and had been so disappointed when Father Christmas gave it to Dudley instead. Father Christmas never gave him what he asked for. In fact, Father Christmas never gave him anything at all. Dudley said it was because Father Christmas didn’t like him very much.

“Wait just a minute young man!” Arabella called him back with authority. “You can’t ride the bike!”

Harry's heart leapt into his throat with disappointment. She wasn't going to let him ride it! She was just like all the rest of the adults in his life, who only let him look and never touch. She had it fixed for Dudley not him. And he was just beginning to like her, cats and all.

"I-I- I can't?"

"No. Definitely not. You heard what Bob said. You can't ride the bike until you put on your helmet, and knee pads, and elbow pads, and pads for anything else that can bend or can break." Arabella said handing him the large sack of protective gear that she had picked up at the SuperMart the night before after she put him to bed.

"Oh!" he laughed relieved and stopped to gear up. By the time that the last pad was in place, Harry seriously doubted he would be able to move let alone ride a bicycle. But if that's what it took to be allowed to get on Ruby Red he was certainly willing give it a try! Once again, he headed out the door, this time with Arabella close behind.

With a spring in her step, Arabella left all her responsibilities behind and hopped on the bicycle. Sure, she hadn't ridden a bike in forty years but they do say you never really forget how to ride a bike once you've learned.

"Now watch me closely Harry. I'll show you how to do it."

Feeling all of eight-years-old herself, Arabella plopped Mr. Paws in the basket and pushed off. Baby Blue fairly jumped down the tarmac in eagerness to be off. Too long Baby Blue had felt abandoned, too long he been left to rot in the rafters, too long had he been ignored. Well not anymore! He would show his ungrateful owner a thing or two!

Totally oblivious to the rebellious sentient entity stealthily embodied in the sleek blue frame below her, Arabella was reveling in the wind blowing through her hair. Down the drive she went, around in a circle and then up the lane.

"Whee!" Arabella cried out in delight, "I forgot how much fun this was! I really shouldn't have left my bicycle neglected for so long."

No, you really shouldn't have, smirked Baby Blue, and now it's time to make sure you don't ever forget me again.

"I should be getting back to Harry now," Arabella thought trying to turn the bicycle.

Baby Blue wouldn't turn.

"Oh no! The main road is up ahead and there is a lot of traffic!" Arabella started to panic slightly and Mr. Paws started to yowl in protest of giving up one of his nine lives over such foolishness.

Baby Blue sped up.

"I better head for that little car park at the corner market and stop." Arabella decided, angling the bicycle slightly so that it wobbled into the lot, narrowly missing the fire hydrant. "Oh no! I didn't forget how to ride, but I did forget how to make it stop! Stop! Please STOP!"

Baby Blue didn't stop.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" Arabella commanded Baby Blue but since Arabella still hadn't had the presence of mind to use the hand breaks, and was just resorting to shouting 'Stop' as if that would somehow do something, Baby Blue decided to ignore her entirely. However, none of the alternatives to not stopping was all that great either...crash into parked cars, crash into moving cars, or...wait! ...crash into that soft looking bush dead ahead.

Baby Blue laughed evilly and did just that. After all, he had just been tenderly put back together by his new friend Bad Boy Bob and he really didn't want to crash into some unforgiving hunk of metal any more that Arabella did. He finally came to a stop with his front tire embedded in the large green arborvitae bush.

Arabella breathed a momentary sigh of relief until with chagrin she felt the world shifting under her in a déjà vu moment.

In slow motion, Baby Blue toppled over to the left.

“Hm...a little late to think of this but I should have put my foot down.” Arabella thought ruefully. Limping back down the road, Arabella pushed Baby Blue slowly back to the cottage.

“Wow! Mrs. Figg! I thought you were a goner!” Harry pointed out with all the subtlety of the eight-almost-nine-year-old he was.

“I was just illustrating why it is important to always wear your helmet. I hope you were taking notes.” Mrs. Figg said coming to a stop in front of him, just as Mr. Paws walked stiffly by with all the dignity of a very miffed cat, snubbing them both with his nose and tail held high in the air.

“Thanks. Got it. Is it my turn now?” Harry asked hopefully. He was hardly able to contain himself from excitement.

“Just remember what not to do.” Arabella advised, and stayed alongside steadying the red bicycle, as Harry started wobbly down the pavement slowly picking up speed.

As the wheels turned faster and faster, he got steadier and steadier, until Arabella finally let go and Harry was on his own...

... gliding smoothly down the tarmac...

... right towards the busy highway...

Ruby Red wasn't turning either. Harry hadn't been the only one taking notes from Arabella and Baby Blue's demonstration.

“Merlin! What have I done? He'll be killed!” Arabella ran down the tarmac after the shiny red bicycle yelling out “Up! Harry! Up!”

Ruby Red sped up.

Harry clung to the handlebars, closed his eyes tight, and tentatively whispered... ‘Up?’

At the command, Ruby Red's tires lifted gently off the tarmac and flew over the speeding cars, to land lightly on the far side. One shiny red bicycle and one small well padded boy all thankfully still intact.

"Harry! Harry? Are you alright?" Arabella asked panting as she jogged up with a limp, her housecoat askew and one carpet slipper missing, to find Harry still with his eyes tightly closed.

"Wow! That was brilliant!" Harry giggled, opening his big green eyes in astonishment. "It felt for a minute as if I were really flying! Can I go again? Please?"

"Um... how about tomorrow? Right now I think I need to do something less dangerous, like bathing the cats." Arabella answered as the two started walking companionably back to the cottage, Ruby Red wheeling proudly between them.

After putting antiseptic on the multiple scratches courtesy of an even more miffed, and now wet Mr. Paws, they had a hamburger dinner, and then Arabella tucked a very tired Harry Potter into the four-poster bed and pulled the quilt up to his chin. Snowy, another one of her cats, made her self right at home on his pillow, with her tail playfully tickling his ear.

"Have a good day?"

"Oh YES Mrs. Figg.! I had the best day ever! Thank you."

"For what?"

"For everything! For the food, for the bicycle ride, and for this wonderful bed to sleep in."

"You know that still puzzles me. Nearly everyone who stays here with me complains that the mattress is lumpy and that they never get a wink of sleep on it. I've thought about replacing it, but it does keep their visits short so I haven't bothered. Just what do you think is so nice about it?"

Harry hesitated before answering. There were two reasons. The first was because it was a bed, simply a bed. All he ever had to sleep on was an old cot with a thin mattress and threadbare blanket, so this one felt luxurious to him. He couldn't think of any word to describe it except for wonderful. But he wasn't supposed to talk about how things were at home. It would make Aunt Petunia very unhappy. And if Aunt Petunia were unhappy, so would be Uncle Vernon. And if Uncle Vernon were unhappy, he would make sure that Harry was in turn.

Somehow telling that to Mrs. Figg, no matter how nice she was to him, was something he just couldn't do. He was too ashamed because he felt like he deserved it. Instead, he told her the second reason, the one that made him feel all warm and cozy inside.

"Er... it's the quilt."

"The quilt?" she repeated startled that he had noticed it.

"Yeah... it smells like – like..." he faltered as he searched for the right words.

"Yes?" she asked gently. "What does it smell like?"

"It smells like a mum. Like –like sunshine, sunshine and lilies. And I had really wonderful dreams sleeping under it last night. I dreamt that I had a real mummy and daddy and even a baby sister. I don't know why, but it just felt like I was being hugged all night long. So, thank you."

"Oh Harry. You are so very welcome." Arabella wished so much that she could tell him why. As she tucked him in, she patted the patch that lay over his heart. It was an especially pretty block of light greens, white, and yellow with delicate lilies printed in the floral pattern of the cotton, a small 'with love – L.P. Nov '79' in the corner. Arabella did some quick mental arithmetic and realized with a start that the little boy who snuggled happily under it now would have barely been a twinkle in his mother's eyes when she embroidered that.

"Mrs. Figg?"

“Yes Harry?”

“Do you have any kids? I mean you’re a ‘missus’ and all, so maybe you do, but I haven’t seen any around.”

“No Harry,” she replied sadly, “I wasn’t blessed with children.”

“That too bad, you would have made a great mum.”

“Thank you Harry.” Arabella laughed. “Most people say it’s a good thing I wasn’t because I’m so scatterbrained that if I had ever had a baby, I would have misplaced it somewhere by now.”

“You mean like my parents did me?”

“Not exactly...”

“I wish I had a real family.” Harry said so softly that she almost didn’t hear him.

‘I wish you did too Harry, I wish you did too.’ Arabella thought as she placed a kiss on his forehead.

“Now go to sleep.”

“kay...”

“Sweet dreams,” she whispered as she turned out the lights.

The rest of the week literally flew by with Arabella and Harry managing by the end of the week to bath all of her cats, tackle the dust bunnies, and take daily bicycle rides. All too soon, it was Sunday and Petunia was ringing her doorbell, shouting for Harry to hurry up, and admonishing him to not keep them waiting. They were on their way home and they needed him to unpack their car.

The little boy sadly said goodbye, as he stood on Arabella’s stoop clutching the same paper bag that he had come with.

"Thank you again Mrs. Figg." He said politely while his uncle sat in the car honking the horn at him to hurry, while Dudley pressing his face against the back window glass to make grotesque faces. "I had a really nice time. It was almost - almost like having a real mummy."

"Anytime Harry, anytime. Say... why don't I keep Ruby here for you? I think she will be better off out of Dudley's sight, and I doubt if he'll even notice she's missing."

"Thanks." Harry said with a smile as he started towards the car.

"What do you think you're doing?" Petunia screeched at him. "There isn't room for you in the car! Run home lazy, it's not that far. And you better be there when we get there!"

"Yes ma'am." Harry acknowledged and then remembering something, ran back and pressed a small piece of cardboard into Arabella's hand before he started running down the pavement towards Privet Drive, his uncle narrowly missing running him down as he passed by. As Vernon roared down the lane, Harry turned and waived once more before he disappeared around the corner, "Goodbye Mrs. Figg! Happy Mother's Day and thanks again for the holiday!"

"I think Albus and I need to have a little chat." Arabella thought to herself as she closed the door, picking up her own suitcase just as the fireplace turned green and her eldest brother's head appeared in the flames.

"You ready to go Ara?"

"Yes Aaron, I'm ready," she answered taking a deep breath as he stepped through the flames into her living room. He had come to escort her back to Hogsmeade. As a squib, while she could see magic, she didn't have enough of it herself to make it work for her. So to use the floo network someone with the ability had to take her.

As Arabella took his arm and stepped into the flames, she gritted her teeth. She loved her brothers. She did. She just wished they didn't have to rub their magic in her face all the time. She didn't want to drive that far by herself in her old decrepit station wagon, but she

would have been perfectly happy taking the bus to Hogsmeade instead. But no, they insisted one of them would come and get her. They probably just didn't want to waste any time to start regaling her with their tales and making her feel like wall paper, something that just hangs around the house, but does very little.

And she was right. The minute she walked in it was 'poor little Arabella this' and 'poor little Arabella that', too bad you can't do magic poor poor little Arabella. It was the same as every other year with one small dark haired exception. But it didn't matter, even if she could talk about it, her brothers would never believe that she, Arabella Doreen Figg, squib extraordinaire, had taught the savior of the wizarding world how to fly.

When asked why she was limping she just smiled, and said she had tripped over a cat. Luckily, when she went to the doctor, after her knee swelled up to the size of a cantaloupe, the x-ray did not show any breaks. She just had a slightly dislocated knee cap. But with enough pain pills, it hadn't stopped her from riding along side Harry. Even the bruises down the left side of her body were beginning to fade.

Sitting at the scrubbed wood table, her leg up on a neighboring chair encased in ice packs courtesy of her overly protective brothers who were once again convinced she couldn't look after herself. Arabella put a vacant look on her face and zoned out of listening to them trying to out-brag each other. Calmly sipping her tea, she idly reflected instead on sentient beings disguised as bicycles.

Baby Blue had been a gift from her brothers as a substitute for the broom that she couldn't make work. She should have known that they would have imbedded a small bit of magic into it, however illegal that might have been. So she wasn't entirely surprised when the magic woke up and tried to exact revenge on her, for her impertinent use. But what surprised her was Ruby Red. She wondered if Father Christmas got the gift tags mixed up. Perhaps he hadn't left it for Dudley after all.

The thought of tags made her remember the small piece of cardboard Harry had pressed into her hand when he left. She had dropped it in

her pocket when her brother had showed up. Fishing it out now, she noticed that Harry had affixed a safety pin to the back with cellophane tape to make it into a badge. On the front, written in small lettering, was the sentiment 'Best Mum for a Day'.

Arabella smiled. Harry had made her a medal.

"I guess Bad Boy Bob was right," she mused pinning it on her blouse proudly. "It does just take one to make it worth it."

~fin~

A Patchwork Angel

Disclaimer: I don't own JKR's Harry Potter, or anything by , or anything else that may seem the least bit familiar. In fact, I own very little, and now even less.

Author: written by DracaDelirus, typed and posted by me too! Thanks again Doc for letting me do this :)

Dedication: This is dedicated to my FF friends for not giving up on me finishing my story. I really AM still working hard on part three and it IS almost finished now! Regretful it is taking so long... I wanted to get parts three through five all done for you too, but... my fault... sorry again. Anyway, this little story is especially dedicated to my very talented writing friend Swanpride who told me all about Christmas in Germany (if you haven't read Swanpride's stories you really should! :) Also dedicated to my friend, 'Dark' Jack of Trade who is also a very talented artist and writer (more good stories to read! :) And to everyone else who read and reviewed my stories the Hundred Acre Wood and I Love M.O.M. Thank you. I am very grateful and humbled that you even bothered. I would have made you all Christmas cards except that I wouldn't have known where to send them anyway so I wrote you a story instead. And this one already has the happy ending included! You don't have to wait for it! YAY! Thank you again. I appreciate you all. :) Oh! And here is what my Christmas card to you would have said:

My Christmas Wish

It isn't wrapped in a box and bow
But I give it with my heart and soul.

My Christmas wish is for you this year
May your life be filled with joy and cheer.

Showered with blessings from up above
And overflowing your days with love.

I wish for you good family and friends
Those who care and are true to the end.

I wish for you a home where you're safe
Nothing to threaten, nothing to chafe.

I wish for you warm hugs when you're cold
And when you are scared a hand to hold.

I wish for you nights of peaceful sleep
Trouble and woe far away to keep.

Gaily wrapped gifts are more fun I know
With shiny paper and fluffy bows

But this is all that I have to give
My wish for you a full life to live

- Happy Christmas! -
DracaDelirus

PatchworkAngelPatchworkAngelegnAkrowhctaPlegnAkrowhctaP

"Ugh! Gerroff me!" Harry's muffled shouts could be heard coming from underneath the hulking lump that was his cousin Dudley. Dudley, older by about a month, and heavier by a good two stones, was currently using his younger and smaller cousin as a floatation device while he polished off what was left of Harry's meager lunch, even though Dudley had already eaten his own more-than-ample lunch earlier. Harry's struggles were useless against the weight of his cousin and they only served to make the crowd of boys surrounding them laugh all the harder at the spectacle. In the distance, the school bell started ringing, signaling the end of the lunch period.

Dudley bounced one more time, grinding Harry even deeper face down into the icy mud puddle, before wiping his hands off on the back of his cousin's shirt. He then hoisted himself up and ambled toward the school with the rest of his pack. Harry sighed and getting up on his hands and knees, he glared at Dudley's retreating back. He was a little bit more dirty, wet, cold and hungry than before lunch, but that was nothing new, just more of the same-old-same-old. But today Dudley had also relieved him of the contents of all his pockets, and

then made sure he would be late going back to the classroom. Why today of all days? Harry groaned as he sat back on his heels.

Before she let them out for lunch, their teacher had told them that she had a very busy afternoon planned. She also told them how disappointed she would be if any of them were tardy returning. Harry really liked this pretty substitute teacher, she was the first one who was ever nice to him more than once, and he hated the thought of seeing disappointment in her eyes knowing that he was the cause.

He would like to blame it on someone else, but ending up in the mud puddle really had been his own fault, he reasoned, so it followed that being late because of it, was also his fault. After all these years, he knew better than to take his lunch sack out before he had checked, and re-checked, to make sure that neither Dudley, nor any of Dudley's friends were around. And Dudley's circle of friends included all the other kids at school, which always made for a very lonely lunch time for Harry. If the other kids were not Dudley's friends through a mutual activity, like 'Harry Hunting', then they were friends through fear and intimidation. Dudley would simply beat up anyone, even older or younger kids, who were even remotely nice to Harry. And each year their Primary teacher soon found out their classroom dynamics ran so much smoother if they pampered Dudley and ignored Harry. For some reason Dudley had made it his own special mission in life to make sure that his 'freaky little cousin' had zero friends and supporters, and he went out of his way to ensure Harry's miserable lonely existence stayed as lonely and miserable as possible.

As the bell stopped ringing Harry got up, wrung out his sopping wet clothes as best as he could, pushed his turned out empty pockets back in, and started trudging across the playground towards the school, the icy slush squishing in through the holes in his trainers with every step. Reaching the classroom door, he took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and mustered the courage to go back into class and face his tormentors once again.

Harry slipped in the door at the back of the classroom as quietly as he could. He was grateful the teacher's back was turned towards the classroom as she wrote the afternoon's agenda on the blackboard.

She hadn't seen him! It might be okay after all! He had almost made it to his seat when he caught the malicious look on Dudley's face and froze like a statue. Dudley grinned from ear to ear as he raised his reader and let it drop flat on the floor with a loud 'BANG!' causing the teacher to jump and break the chalk with a spine tingling squeal across the board.

Rose Krueger swung around and glared at the class with a stern look, effectively squelching the spattering of snickers coming from the children in the room. Spying the offending noise maker easily she said in a strained voice, "Shush! Dudley! I said this is quiet time! You're supposed to be reading." She had a migraine headache that matched the pain in her lower back caused by her pregnancy. Rose was close to her due date and the doctor said she shouldn't be working, at least not on her feet, but she and her husband were broke and really needed the money with the baby coming, and substitute teaching was all she could get. It was just a stroke of luck for her that the position unexpectedly became available. So even though she should be off her feet, here she was standing in front of a classroom all day, because as everyone knows, you can't keep up with a classroom of nine-year-olds sitting down.

"Mrs. Krueger it wasn't me! I swear!" Dudley piped up. "It was Harry. He was trying to sneak in late and he knocked the book off my desk on purpose! He's trying to get me into trouble. Isn't he?" Dudley asked of the rest of the class and sat back smugly as twenty other nine-year-old heads nodded in complete agreement. He was still training this substitute teacher what-was-what and who-was-who. She just didn't seem to get it like the other teachers, and kept trying to be nice to his freaky little cousin.

Rose looked doubtfully at Dudley. Harry was two rows over and was nowhere near Dudley's desk, notwithstanding that small insurmountable geographical fact was the reasoning that if Harry was trying to sneak in, as he had indeed been trying to do - one look on his mortified face attested to that fact - then knocking into Dudley's desk on purpose and calling attention to himself would have been the last thing he would have done.

"Harry?"

“Dudley’s right ma’am. I did it. Sorry.” Harry said swallowing hard and staring at his feet. He just couldn’t look up and see her disappointed in him again, but there was absolutely no way he was going to rock the boat, not this close to Christmas anyway!

Harry had learned very early on that it was far easier on him in the long run, to just go along with whatever Dudley said, whether it was true or not. Besides, this year he was trying so very hard to be extra good so that maybe, just maybe, he would have a chance that his Christmas wish would finally come true. Not rocking the boat, and keeping Dudley more or less happy, was the best way he could figure out how to do that. And Dudley was only happy when Harry was in trouble.

Rose sighed. She just didn’t know what to do. Dudley was obviously the culprit, as he normally was, but once again, his reserved cousin was seemingly willing to take the blame. Short of calling both boys liars, there was nothing she could do to prevent it.

“I’m sure you are Harry. Very well then, take your seat and get out your reader. For coming in late and for disrupting the class you will write an essay on your Christmas country while the rest of the students have their arts and crafts time. The information on your country can be found on pages one sixty five through one seventy. Begin now.”

“Yes ma’am.” Harry said quietly and nodded obediently. He slipped into his seat and opened his book, never raising his head once, but from the dejected slump of his shoulders, it was obvious he had been looking forward to the activity that he was now missing out on. Since it was the last day before the Christmas break, the class was going to be finishing their Christmas ornaments that afternoon, so that they could take them home to decorate their trees.

The class had been studying the different Christmas customs of countries around the world, and every child had been making an ornament to represent the country that ‘belonged’ to them. The teacher had put the names of the countries into a box, and everyone

got to draw one out. Harry had originally drawn England, but Dudley had thrown a fit because according to his father, England was the only country that mattered, so Dudley refused to participate if he had to do anything else. To keep the peace, Harry gave him the slip of paper with England on it, and took Dudley's slip for Germany instead.

Three weeks ago, they had spent Arts and Crafts time designing what they wanted their ornaments to look like. The week after that, they had actually made the ornament shapes out of clay and then carefully punched a little hole in the top of each one for the ribbon hanger. Then last week the teacher had taken them on a field trip to watch their works of art being fired in a kiln. Today they were finally going to get to paint and decorate them.

The class had been anticipating the culmination of their efforts all month, chatting about what colors they were going to use, and what adornments they were going to glue on them. Dudley had been bragging his would be the best of all. And had told the class how his mum had taken him to a craft store to buy real baubles with which to finish it. But truth be known, if Harry hadn't already known what country Dudley's ornament was supposed to represent, he would never have been able to figure it out. Other than the hole for hanging it, his ornament didn't look that much different from the lump of clay he'd started with. And for all his bragging, he wasn't sure if even Dudley knew what it was supposed to be.

Harry's ornament was an angel. He had carefully sculpted the little body and face, and had been gathering bits of odds and ends, and scraps from here and there to make its dress and wings. While he knew all the countries that they studied had angels in some form or another in their culture, so they weren't strictly German, he felt an overwhelming desire to make his an angel. Once the idea came into his head, he couldn't imagine his ornament being anything else. It was all he had thought about for weeks, ever since Mrs. Krueger's first day as their teacher when she had stood in front of the class and told them of the project. The image of his angel ornament had come into his head while she had been describing to class the steps they would follow to make them, and he just knew that if he could make the angel, and make it perfect, that everything would be different somehow. This was his chance.

It hurt Rose almost more than it did Harry to take away his arts and crafts time. But what else could she do? The class had been on an unruly pre-holiday sugar-rush high all morning. So she had announced before the children left for their lunch break, that missing the activity would be the penalty for anyone coming back late today, as they had a lot to do and she needed everyone to be prompt. It was hard to teach lessons in responsibility if the one teaching it backed down and played favorites, she thought. Besides, if she did, it would do Harry more harm than good with his peers. But it was only during art class when he came out of his protective shell at all, and Rose was able to catch the even merest glimpse of the carefree child he kept hidden deep within himself. Something about this particular little boy had gotten to her like no other child had, and she had been eagerly looking forward to seeing that moment again all morning. For the rest of the time, he was a withdrawn serious boy who, other than occupying the next to the last seat in the third row from the windows, was for all intents and purposes not even a part of the class.

Rose only wished she knew what to do to help him. But she was just a substitute teacher brought in for the month while the permanent teacher was recovering from an accident, so she had little standing in the school. Unlike Harry's teachers from previous years, all of whom wrote comments in his file about him being a trouble maker and difficult to teach, she thought he was a wonderful boy with great potential. But from her talks with the school counselor it seemed the more anyone from the school had tried to help him in the past, by talking with his Aunt and Uncle, the more withdrawn Harry became. If he retreated any further into his shell, Rose was afraid he would never come back out. And she had so little time left to reach him, as this would be her last day teaching his class.

All during the afternoon while his fellow classmates were loud and boisterous, glitter and glue going everywhere, Harry sat in his seat writing his essay, trying not to shiver while his clothes dried. He was glad he had wrung the worst of the water out of them before he came back into the school, even if it had made him late. He knew from past experience that if he hadn't, it would just be all that worse for him when he got home.

The last time he had gotten so wet during winter was the previous year when Dudley and his gang had buried him in a snowdrift. When he had gone inside the teacher had scolded him for dripping all over her classroom floor and asked him why he hadn't worn his coat on the playground. When he told her that it was because he didn't have one to wear, she immediately called his Aunt, his Aunt called his Uncle, and his Uncle called his teacher and told her that he was a liar. His uncle told her that they had bought him a quite expensive coat, one that he had then carelessly lost, and that he hadn't wanted to admit it to them. His uncle then gave him a lesson on talking out of turn, and locked him in his cupboard for a week to think about it, while he told the school that his absence was due to the bad cold he had caught while running around without a coat on. After that, the teacher never believed anything else he said, so he just quit talking altogether unless he absolutely couldn't avoid it. He just didn't see any point in wasting his breath when no one would listen anyway.

After finishing his essay, he closed his book and waited for the class to finish decorating their ornaments. He was disappointed that he wouldn't be able to finish his angel with the other children, but he reasoned that it was probably for the best anyway. If he had finished it, Dudley would have just found a way to have broken it. Dudley did things like that. Besides, when Dudley and his gang had cornered Harry on the playground they had emptied Harry's pockets. They took all the treasured bits and pieces he had been gathering for weeks and dumped it all into the icy mud puddle, right before pushing Harry into it as well. All his trimmings were gone. He couldn't have finished it, even if he had been allowed to.

Sighing, Harry took off his glasses and put his head down on his desk. Watching the activities out of focus, through his partially closed eyelashes, he tried to pretend that he was part of the fun. Somehow that was easier to do when Dudley blurred into an unrecognizable blob (somewhat reminiscent of his ornament), and if he put his fingers in his ears to muffle Dudley's loud voice he could almost imagine that Dudley wasn't even there. The thought put a dreamy smile on his face.

When his field of vision was suddenly blocked, Harry sat up in panic and grabbed for his glasses. How stupid could he get! He let his

guard down when he knew Dudley was around. That was twice in one day! He breathed a sigh of relief when his eyes came back into focus to see that it was only Mrs. Krueger standing in front of him and not his cousin.

“Are you done with your essay Harry?”

“Yes ma’am.” he said flushed and slightly out of breath as he handed her the paper.

“Good.” She said giving him an encouraging smile. On the spur of the moment Rose decided she was going to do something to include Harry in the class whether he wanted it or not, so she said, “I thought it might be nice if I read it aloud to the class... to wrap up our studies on Christmas from around the world.”

“NO! DON’T! I mean... please... please don’t ma’am.” he quietly begged her.

The color draining out of Harry’s face, at the prospect of his essay being read out loud, made Rose question her impulse. But she was sure that he hadn’t written a poor essay. The few writing assignments of his that she had read during the prior weeks had all been very creative and well written. He had quite an imaginative flair and Rose thought that he was a born storyteller. Perhaps reading the essay would showcase his talents to his classmates and help him become accepted by the class. As she couldn’t think of any downside to it, she decided to ignore the panic she could see rising in his large green eyes and just patted his hand reassuringly before asking the class to gather around in a reading circle.

As the children pulled their chairs into a semi-circle in the front of the class, Harry remained at his desk in the back of the room. He just slid down in his chair, farther and farther, until the only part of his face visible was his accusing eyes, fixed stonily on his teacher. Maybe if he pretended hard enough this wouldn’t be happening. But it was... Mrs. Krueger was clearing her throat and starting to read. She had smiled at him once or twice, and hadn’t really yelled at him as the other teachers had, so he thought she kind of liked him... a little... guess not.

Christmas in Germany

Christmas in Germany is different from Christmas here in England. While in England, we celebrate Christmas on the twenty fifth of December when Father Christmas comes to visit us with toys and gifts, in Germany their Christmas celebration starts much earlier. Their holidays start first in mid-November with lantern parades and songs, in honor of St. Martin, and then with a visit by St. Niklaus on the sixth of December. On that night, the children clean their shoes and put them out, to wake the next morning to find them filled with sweets and treats.

Since my country is Germany, I followed their traditions this year and put my shoes out on the sixth of December to see if St. Niklaus visited children in England too. I tried to wait up all night so I could see if St. Niklaus and Father Christmas looked anything alike, but I fell asleep before he came. But he did come! My shoes were filled with wonderful things like Gebrannte Mandeln, chocolate Pralines, and Lebkuchen, and everything with lots and lots of vanilla in it, just like I like it. I ate so much nuts and candy that I didn't eat anything else all weekend!

In Germany, they spend the next several weeks visiting the Weihnachtsmarkt, the Christmas Market, making Christmas Cards, and baking. They light an advent candle on a wreath every Sunday, and sit around it with their family and eat Christmas cookies and listen to songs. They make every day leading up to Christmas a special day. They also do most of their decorating indoors with homemade ornaments instead of outdoors with colored lights. And they make many of the gifts they give themselves. On December twenty- fourth the Christkind comes and they exchange gifts to honor the day. Then on the twenty fifth when we are celebrating our Christmas here in England, and on the twenty sixth when we have our Boxing Day, in Germany they are spending these two days visiting with family and friends.

For my Christmas ornament, I am making a German Angel because the Christkind is a kind of angel who brings presents. If I had friends in Germany, I would visit them for Christmas and we would decorate

their tree with strings of popped corn and cranberries, and make paper stars and snowflakes to decorate it, and sing carols all night long. And my Angel would go on the very top of the tree. And in the morning, there would be lots of presents under the tree with my name on them. Things like paper to draw on, my very own colored pencils, and a book to read, and maybe even a new notebook to write in. And the best of all, because my Angel is magic, she would bring my mummy and daddy back to me and maybe even a baby sister to play with. Then I would have a family again who loved me, and I wouldn't be stuck in a cupboard all alone anymore.

I think that Christmas in Germany is much better than Christmas in England. I wish I lived in Germany.

"Oh Harry..." Rose's voice caught in her throat as she looked up to find an intensely humiliated look in Harry's eyes as they sunk below the surface of the desk. A poorly disguised snort of laughter brought her attention back to the semi-circle of children and an equally intense gleeful look on Dudley's face.

'Oh my gods! What have I done!?!' Rose thought.

"Harry's lying Mrs. Krueger!" Dudley sing-songed. "He didn't get nuthin' but a rock!"

"Anything." Rose automatically corrected him, before realizing what he said and doing a double take. "Dudley? What do you mean Harry didn't get anything but a rock? For what?"

"From St. Niklaus Ma'am... Harry was trying to clean his ratty ol' shoes with the hose pipe and Mum asked him what he was doing. When he told her, she told me to clean my shoes too. And the next morning mine was filled with jellies and boiled sweets and toffees and Harry just had a dirty old rock in his. Ha ha ha!"

As the children in the room broke out in titters and giggles, Harry simultaneously tried to sink even lower in his seat, while tucking his dilapidated trainers underneath him out of view. Only the top of his messy black hair was visible over the desk by this time.

“Children! Quiet!” Trying to salvage the situation Rose tried to redirect the focus by saying, “Thank you Harry for sharing your thoughts about German Christmas customs with us. I must say I agree with you. Germany is a very nice place to live. I lived in Germany for a short while myself. In fact, that is where I met and married my husband. So I am quite fond of the country. There are beautiful forests as well as big cities. And...”

Rose let out a sigh of relief as the bell signaling the end of the school day, pealed in the hallway, causing all the children, except for Dudley, to forget all about tormenting Harry in their rush out the door to start their Christmas holiday. As the classroom cleared, all that could be heard was Harry’s rapid breathing echoing from underneath the desk, Dudley’s snickers from the vicinity of the arts and crafts area, and Rose’s chair squeaking as she got up.

“I am so sorry Harry. I didn’t realize...”

“It’s okay Mrs. Krueger. It doesn’t matter anyhow.” came the muffled reply.

“But it does matter.”

“Why?”

“Because YOU matter Harry.” Rose wasn’t sure at first if the little boy had ever heard that before, but the doubt radiating from Harry, coupled with Dudley’s rising laughter, confirmed her suspicions that he hadn’t.

“...I... I do?”

“Yes Harry. You do.” Rose replied very firmly, as an idea on how to make it up to him, for the embarrassment she caused, popped into her head. “Doesn’t your Aunt pick you and Dudley up from school every day?”

“Yes Mrs. Krueger, well kind of... she picks up Dudley and I just sort of go along with them. We better go now ma’am. She’ll be mad if I

keep her waiting any longer.” Harry said softly and he started to rise out of his chair.

“No Harry. You sit back down. I’ll be right back. Dudley, come with me.”

As Harry sat back down in his seat, Dudley brushed by and leaned down close, whispering in his ear, “I’m going to tell Mum you used the ‘M’ word! Just wait till we get home!”

Harry shuddered as he watched his teacher walking briskly out of the room with Dudley trailing behind. Boy was he in for it now! Dudley was going to tell Aunt Petunia about the disastrous essay! And Aunt Petunia would tell Uncle Vernon and Uncle Vernon would... well... he’d rather not think about it.

“There it’s all settled.” Rose said smiling broadly, as she came back in a few minutes later looking exceedingly pleased with herself.

“What’s settled ma’am?” Harry asked curiously, looking behind her expecting to see his Aunt’s furious face and not finding it.

“You and I are going to finish your ornament, and your Aunt will pick you up later. I sent Dudley to tell her that I needed to keep you after school for coming in late and your Aunt replied that she and Dudley were going to do some Christmas shopping anyway and that it would be helpful if you could stay with me for a while.”

“She did? It’s okay?” he breathed, amazed at his uncharacteristic good fortune. He would rather stay late at school any day, over being dragged from store to store, while his Aunt bought mountains of gifts for Dudley and none for him. The only reason she ever took him along was to carry the packages.

“Yes it is. They are probably shopping for your gifts, and don’t want you to see them, so that you’ll be surprised.” Rose said optimistically.

“Oh I’ll be surprised all right...” Harry muttered and then finished with a whisper he didn’t think his teacher would hear, “...if I ever got a present from any of them. Never have yet.”

Rose shook her head. No! Surely, he's had presents before?! He had said it so quietly she must have heard him wrong, she thought, dismissing her misgivings.

"So Harry... did you bring anything special to decorate your ornament with? You're making an angel right?"

"...er... yes... um... no... well... I did have some things but Dudley..."

"Oh, I see." Rose said knowingly. "Well, let's just move on then... now... what do we need..." she muttered thinking dark thoughts about Dudley as she started rummaging for the glue and glitter. "What would you like? Sequins? Glitter? That's what most of the kids used."

"... no ma'am... nothing like that... I ... I wanted to make her really pretty... just... just like a real angel. I wanted her to be perfect. I... I was going to put some real hair on her head, but my Aunt wouldn't let me use her scissors..."

"That was very responsible of her Harry. Children shouldn't use scissors unless an adult is helping them. She probably just didn't want you to get hurt."

"Oh no ma'am it wasn't that at all. My Aunt just doesn't like me to touch any of her things."

"Oh... well I'm sure she had a good reason."

"Oh yes ma'am she does..." he agreed nodding, finishing the thought silently to himself, '...so I won't contaminate them with my freakishness'... "...but without being able to use the scissors all I could get was some yarn... but it's gone now..."

"I'm so sorry... maybe we can replace it though." She said brightly. "What color did you want to make your angel's hair?"

"I dunno... I was thinking... red would be perfect... but all I had was gray yarn... I guess I could make some more..." his voice trailed off and he started staring downwards again in his embarrassment.

Rose followed his line of sight and focused on the fact that her student was only wearing one rather old worn gray sock, its mate was missing.

"Harry where is your other sock? Isn't your foot cold?"

"Yes ma'am..." his cheeks flushed. "...but as I said... all I had was gray yarn..."

"Oh..." Rose said at a loss for words while thinking 'how much more of an idiot can I be to this child?' "...well how about the dress then... what would you like for that? I have some pretty colored construction paper."

"I had a bit of real blue lace with ribbon on it from an old handkerchief my Aunt threw away because it was stained. I... thought it would be pretty and diaphone... dieappany... dieafone... ah... die-a-..."

"Diaphanous?"

"Yes! Die-ap-fone-ness... but I... lost it in a mud puddle..."

"What about for the wings?"

"Oh!" he said brightening up a bit at first, "I had some robin feathers that I found last summer in the back garden that I saved. They really should have been white feathers for an angel, but Aunt Petunia wouldn't let me have any of the ones from her feather pillow."

"How about ones from your pillow?"

"I... I don't have one... a pillow that is..." he said rapidly, "...but the robin feathers... they were real anyways! Much better! They were from a real bird! Feathers that had been way up in the sky and knew how to fly! Not just ones from a stupid old pillow that never flew anywhere. So even though they weren't white, I was going to use

them so that my angel could really fly! She needs to be able to really fly. Really, really, really high... so she can take my wish up ...”

“Up where Harry?” she gently prodded.

“...uh... it doesn’t matter anyway because they’re...”

“Let me guess... at the bottom of the mud puddle too?”

“Yes’m.” he said dejectedly and nodded.

“Well... we could paint the face on? I have some nice acrylics. Shall we make the eyes blue?”

“I had real diamonds for her eyes... you know... so they would sparkle... well they probably weren’t real diamonds, but they were sparkly... I looked and looked and looked until I found a really shiny rock and then I chipped at it until I got some bits just the right size. They were yellowish though... should have been green...”

“I think I see now... none of this will really do for an angel as exceptional as yours, will it?” Rose said thoughtfully looking at the commonplace craft supplies the class had left scattered across the table.

“It’s okay ma’am, really.” Harry said quickly to reassure her. “Whatever you have is fine. I can use the glitter and construction paper. Really I can! I’m sorry... I didn’t mean to complain... I just wanted her to be... perfect. But it doesn’t matter...”

“No Harry. It does matter and I want to help, so let me see what else I can find. Why don’t you get your ornament, and whatever supplies you can find that might help and I’ll be right back. Okay?”

As Rose ran out of the room, she could hear a small ‘Alright ma’am’ floating after her. Such a polite boy. She shook her head in disgust. How could any of his teachers have ever written that he was a troublemaker! She just couldn’t see it. Of all the children in the class, Harry was the least likely to cause trouble in her opinion. The only reason she could see why they would have labeled him that way was

if they had mixed him up with that delinquent cousin of his. Now, there was a real troublemaker. Probably grow up to be a bully. He already had a big head start down that path.

Entering the teachers lounge, she was relieved but not surprised, to find it empty. With the holidays approaching fast, everyone, including the teachers, had cleared out as soon as possible after the final bell. Securing the door, she picked up the phone and rang her husband.

“Jimmy? Can you come right away? I need you. No! I mean... right now! Yes! I do mean that. I’m in the teachers lounge. Just be quick and careful. No, it’s clear. There’s no one here. Thanks love!” Turning around Rose caught her breath as her husband appeared before her out of thin air.

“I don’t know if I will ever get used to that!”

“All in good time my love, all in good time. You’ll remember. It will all come back to you. I know it will. I have faith. Until then... well, the doctors said you just need some familiar surroundings. And Little Whinging was the safest familiar surroundings I could think of. It’s not quite like the town where you grew up, but its close, and it’s safer. And it’s so... so... muggle... is that why you needed me? Did you remember something finally? Is your magic coming back?” He asked hopefully.

“No, still a blank. It isn’t that... I need you...”

“Okay! You got me!” Jimmy caught his pregnant wife around the waist and swung her into his arms in an embrace...

“Jimmy! Not now!” Rose said pushing him away playfully.

“No?”

“No! That’s not why I called you here either!”

“It isn’t...” he pretended to pout and look disappointed, yet the merry look in his eyes gave him away.

“Oh you! No, I need help with a project.” Quickly she filled him in about the little lonely boy in her class, his bully of a cousin, and her gigantic faux pas that had unintentionally cause him embarrassment in front of his classmates, and finally her idea to help him finish his ornament.

“So what can I do to help?” Jimmy asked pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose, crossing his arms, and becoming all business.

“I knew I could count on you! I need to replace the bits and pieces that his cousin destroyed... I need some blue lace and ribbon, some white feathers from a real bird and not from a pillow...”

“...but aren’t pillow feathers from birds too?” he asked puzzled.

“...not the same...” she said shaking her head “... don’t ask... also I need something small, green, and sparkly and...” she took a deep breath, “...some red hair.” She finished holding out a pair of scissors. Then turning her back she unpinned her hair, letting the flowing deep red locks hang loose down her back.

“You don’t mean...?”

“Yes I do.” She said closing her eyes. “Cut.”

“This little boy must have really gotten to you.”

...snip! snip!...

“He has. Even the baby seems to like him.”

...snip!...

“What makes you think that?”

“Every time he is close by or I hear his voice, the baby starts kicking up a storm, like it wants to come out and play with him. Guess even the baby knows he needs a friend.” She replied opening her eyes again, and sighing at the shorn locks now in her palm. “Well, it’s not like it won’t grow back.”

“So what else do we need?”

“Um... blue lace and ribbon, two green sparkles and some white feathers.”

“Okay, I get the blue lace and ribbon... must be for the dress... and the white feathers for wings are a natural, but what are the green sparkles for?”

“The angel’s eyes.”

“He’s making a red-haired green-eyed angel, in a blue dress, with white wings?” Jimmy asked with a small smile playing around his lips.

“That’s right... what’s so funny about it?”

“Look.” He said turning her around to face the mirror hanging on the far wall of the lounge. In it, she could see her own red-haired green-eyed reflection standing there in a robin’s egg blue dress, with a white fluffy sweater tied around her shoulders.

“Oh Jimmy! You don’t think....”

“He’s a man after my own heart, love. “ Jimmy replied whispering in her ear. “He has great taste in women anyway. And I think I may be a wee bit jealous. After all, you never cut your hair for me.”

“That’s because you never needed it to make an angel.”

“That’s because I already have one.” He said softly giving her a hug from behind. “Now let’s get the rest of the items so your little boy can have his angel too, before he gets an idea into his head to take mine! I’ll pop back home and see what I can find. Won’t be long.” He said kissing her neck and disappearing.

Rose pinned back up the rest of her hair, disguising the missing locks and went back to the classroom, to find a distraught Harry sitting on the floor rocking back and forth, clutching his ornament to his chest.

“What’s wrong Harry?” she asked with concern, the smile fading from her face as she knelt down beside him.

“He killed her.” Harry replied in a dull monotone, two large fat tears threatening to roll down his cheeks any minute.

“Who killed who?”

“Dudley. He killed my angel.” He said holding out his hands in which the clay ornament lay in several pieces. “He smashed her.”

“Oh, it isn’t that bad... maybe a little glue...”

“Really?”

“Really.” She said taking the pieces with confidence she didn’t feel, while he blinked back the tears and looked hopeful again.

Rose couldn’t let him down, not after everything that had happened today. But she knew glue alone wouldn’t fix it for the clay was in too many pieces. She took a deep breath, where was Jimmy when she needed him? She knew it was up to her. It was now or never. Holding them tight in her own hands, she winked conspiringly at Harry. “Since your angel is magic what we need is a magic spell to make her better. Can you think of one?”

Harry thought about that deeply. He often had dreams about magic even though his Aunt and Uncle told him there was no such thing, and forbade him to even say the word. Now he tried to bring some of the buried fragments to the surface. “How about... avara-kedav-a-da?”

A shudder went through Rose as a cold feeling of fear rippled through her. That sounded so familiar, and yet the syllables were slightly... wrong. Her mind pushed the thought away and she forced the smile back on her face. “No... I think it should be something simpler... a word about fixing or maybe repairing. Can you think of a good word like that?”

“Hm... how about... Repair-it?”

“Oh! That’s good but how about we... use... um... ‘Repar-o’ instead? Has more of a... magical... flair to it, don't you think?”

“Okay. That’s good too. But what good is a magic spell by itself? Don’t we need a magic wand too?”

“Right you are Harry! And I happen to have one!”

‘You do?’ he asked amazed, his eyes growing large.

“Of course I do! What good primary teacher would be caught without a magic wand? How would we ever get all the children to behave without one?” she asked with a merry twinkle in her eyes as she got up and started rummaging through her purse. “Now where did I put it?” she murmured, “Ah! Yes! Here it is!” she said taking out a slender length of light colored wood. “Willow, ten and a quarter inches, very swishy, nice for charms work... now where did that come from?” she asked puzzled as a memory danced tantalizing just barely out of reach in her subconscious.

“Your purse ma’am?”

“What?” She said, breaking out of her trance.

“You asked where the wand came from, and I said ‘your purse’.”

“Oh right!” Rose said shaking off the déjà vu feeling and, with some effort sat back down on the floor facing Harry. “Okay now, you’ll have to help me with this. Hold the pieces together how they should be and close your other hand over the top of them. And then close your eyes and say the magic word with me.”

Harry did as instructed and arranged the fragments in one small hand and then closing the other over it, he squished his eyes tightly shut and whispered ‘Reparo’ at the same time Rose held her breath and swished and flicked the wand. The movement feeling so natural and so right.

‘Please work! Please work! Please work!’ She chanted to herself forcing all her will into the simple spell. As she felt a warm rush of energy, the baby moved inside her, as if it were trying to help influence the outcome as well. So intent was the pair on healing the little broken ornament, that neither of them saw Jimmy slipping in the back door of the classroom with packages in his hands.

Entering the classroom, Jimmy only had eyes for his lovely wife, whose face was practically glowing as her buried magic started to reemerge. He couldn’t see the little black haired boy’s face, since his back was to him, but he was sure that the boy had to be as entranced by the sight as much as he was. And jealous of him or not, he would be forever grateful for what the little boy was unknowingly doing for his wife. He was giving her a reason to find the magic within herself again. Something, that no matter how hard he had tried, Jimmy had been able to accomplish.

Jimmy swallowed hard and choked back a small sob. Seeing Rose being so tender with the little boy was too hard to witness. That should have been their son. He would have been close to the same age, the same dark hair, if only...

“I think we did it! I think we did it!” the little boy laughed suddenly, breaking the trance in the room as he felt the pieces meld together in his hand.

“Of course we did! After all, your angel is magic. Right?” Rose said with relief as she let the wand drop and arched to relieve her back.

“Right!” Harry affirmed.

“Here are the locks of red hair you wanted. Why don’t you get started with that and I’ll go see if the rest of the items have arrived. I’ll be right back.” As Rose maneuvered to get back up from the floor, Jimmy slipped silently back out the door. He hurried to the teacher’s lounge, where Rose found him whistling and leaning nonchalantly against the wall when she came in flushed and breathless.

“I did it Jimmy! I did it!”

“Did what?”

“A spell! I did a spell and it worked!”

“You did? Are you sure it wasn’t the little boy who did it?” he teased.

“You RAT! You already knew!”

“Guilty! I saw. You weren’t here when I got back so I went looking for you. I got there just in time to see it work. And by the way... call me anything you want but a ‘rat’. Considering all, that’s just too low of a blow.”

“Okay... you... you... TROLL! But what if it wasn’t me like you said...”
Rose started to doubt.

“I was just teasing Rosie, it was you. You should have seen yourself! You were glowing with magic!”

“But Jimmy. If my magic is back... why isn’t my memory? I thought that they would come together.”

“I don’t know hon... the mind is a funny thing. We’ll just have to take it one step at a time. And for a first step, this is a very, VERY good one. As long as you didn’t have your magic, we haven’t been able to safely reveal to the wizarding world that we are even alive. For all our friends know, we are both dead too, just like...”

“...just like our first born child.” Rose finished.

“Yes.”

“Oh Jimmy! I wish I could remember. Won’t you tell me anything? Was it a boy or a girl?”

“The doctors all said you would be better off if you remembered everything on your own, and I didn’t try to force it on you. Losing our baby... as we did... was very traumatic for you. It’s why you lost your memory, and why you went into that catatonic state to begin with. I won’t risk you going back there. No. No hints. We are going to take

this slow and gentle. If it comes back, it comes back. If it doesn't, we'll then we will just make new memories... happy ones, with the new baby."

"The 'new' baby. Jimmy... it almost sounds like we are trying to replace our first born as if it were defective or something. And I can't do that. I was a mother before, and I am still a mother. I can sense that much. As this baby has been growing, I have been having more and more feelings about the one we lost. And the more I feel about it, the more sure I am that my other baby is out there somewhere waiting for me to find it. I have to remember Jimmy! I have to! It's been over eight years!"

"You will, just give it time. Okay love?" Jimmy said holding her in a tight embrace. Her continual denial of their first baby's death was hard for him to deal with. He just had to keep reminding himself that she had only been dealing with it for a short time, while he had had years to come to terms with it. "You've already taken the first step. And you've only been 'awake' for two years now. And it took me one of those two years to convince you to marry me all over again."

"Well, just because a girl doesn't have a memory, doesn't make her easy."

"Ha! Nothing has been easy. I tell you, ever since I came out of my own coma five years ago; it has been hard to make ends meet, what with hospital bills and all. The money ran out quickly, and a wizarding degree doesn't get you very far in the muggle world. And with having to fly below the radar, so to speak, nothing has been easy. But you my dear are worth every bit of bother."

"I love you Jimmy."

"I love you too Rosie. But aren't we forgetting someone?"

"Who?"

"Your little angel maker."

“OH! I was so excited to tell you about the spell! You’re right I need to get back. His Aunt will be coming soon to pick him up, and we need to get finished before she does. Did you find the rest of the items on the list?”

“Voila! Six snowy white feathers, from a most accommodating owl.” Jimmy said waving the plumage like a fan.

“Ooo! Those will work nicely!”

“Wasn’t sure how many you needed so I thought three for each wing.”

“Perfect! And what about the lace?”

“Well... this is all I could find.” He said reluctantly holding out a gaily wrapped package. “Happy Christmas!”

“What’s this?”

“Your Christmas gift from me. It’s blue, it has lace, it has ribbons...”

Rose tore open the package to reveal a delicate nightgown that took her breath away. “It’s the one I saw in the shop that we couldn’t afford! How...?”

“I’ve been working double shifts.” He shrugged. “Skipped a lunch or two... and I thought... well, I just thought that maybe you needed something, other than that old patched flannel one you’ve been wearing, when you went to Hospital to deliver. Can’t have my wife looking shabby can I?”

“Oh Jimmy! You shouldn’t have!” Rose said her face glowing almost as much as it had when her magic reemerged.

“Do you want to do the honors this time?” Jimmy asked holding out the scissors.

Rose lifted the soft material one more time to her cheek before resolutely slicing into it to snip out enough for an angel’s dress. “There. That’s done. Now how about the green glitters?” she asked

before looking up to see Jimmy holding out one more small wrapped package.

“No! Jimmy, not that!” She knew what was in the package he held. It was the Christmas gift she had purchased for Jimmy, a new watch, to replace the old cheap one on his wrist that kept stopping. It had little tiny green emerald chips at the twelve and six hour marks. Tiny, green, and glittery. It fit the bill. But no! Not the watch! She had scrimped and saved pennies for months to have enough to buy him something special for their first Christmas together, “...but wait a minute! How do you know what in it?”

“I peeked.” he shrugged.

“YOU WHAT!” she thundered advancing threateningly.

“I... um... peeked?” he retreated with discretion to a safe distance. “Don’t you know better than to leave a curious man alone in a tiny flat with a gift wrapped box?”

“Apparently... it is one of those things I forgot!”

“Ah... don’t be mad Rosie... and it turns out better this way!” Jimmy said brightly. “At least I got a chance to wear and enjoy my gift for a while.”

“You... you WORE IT ALREADY!?!?”

“...well... just once... or... or twice... Okay! Okay! Three times, but that was definitely it. And I wrapped it up really carefully after each time. See? Even the tape isn’t torn!” He said proudly.

“I’ll give you torn...” Rose growled as she ripped the little box out of his hands and opened it. Taking the watch out of the box, she dropped it on the floor and stomped on it with a vengeance. “...here I am twenty months pregnant, on my feet forty hours a day, all to surprise you. And for what? With a non-surprise, that’s what!”

“Hey Rose? ... honey? ... sweetie-pie?” Jimmy cajoled to get her attention. “I think you have properly destroyed it enough to get out the green sparklies. Haven’t you?”

“Oh right!” Rose said stopping her tirade, as he leaned down to pluck the remains of the gift off the floor and drop the two emerald chips in her palm.

“I’m sorry I peeked and ruined your surprise. I was just so excited. And you know me and anything wrapped up with a bow, I just can’t wait to open it. Never could. Probably never will. Am I forgiven?” he pleaded his case looking properly chagrined.

“I suppose. I could never stay mad at you for very long. Never could, at least not that I can remember. Probably never will.” Rose acquiesced.

“Tell me one thing though... why such an expensive watch? I mean it had real emeralds.”

“I thought that the emeralds would remind you of me every time you looked at it. A way for us to always be together even when we were apart.”

“Honey, I don’t need green emeralds on a watch face to remind me of you. I think about you every minute of every day, when were together or when were apart. Don’t you know you’re always in my thoughts? I don’t need any other present as long as I have you.”

“And I don’t need a filmy blue nightgown either, as long as I have you too.”

“Well... that gift was really for me too.” Jimmy said ruefully.

“Oh you big tease! Do you ever think about anything else?”

“Like I said, you are always on my mind.” He said giving her a kiss.

Rose pulled out of the embrace a little breathless. "As fun as this is, I need to get back now. Here take all this trash with you and I'll see you later."

"Much?"

"Not much. Maybe an hour. Then we can decorate the tree, and put our presents..." Rose faltered, "...under it."

"Well, we can still decorate it!" Jimmy agreed with a grin. "And that's the fun part anyway. And presents? Pfft! Who need presents! As I said, I have all the gifts I want right here. Maybe you can wrap yourself up in a bow later?" Jimmy said kissing her bulging tummy, and giving her a last hug before he disappeared with a small 'crack', his smile disappearing last, just like the Cheshire cat.

"Hrumph!" Rose shook her head exasperatedly. "If he keeps up with those pranks, one of these days he's going to splinch that smile right off his face!"

Returning to the classroom, she found Harry industriously finishing the angel's hair. He was a study of concentration, his unruly hair sticking up in back, and his tongue sticking out the corner of his mouth, while he pushed his too large glasses back up his nose. The look and movement so reminiscent of her beloved Jimmy, when he was putting on his 'serious' face, that it struck a protective chord deep inside her.

Looking over his shoulder Rose was surprised at the beauty of his work. Unlike the rest of the kids in his class who would have glued it on in one big messy glob, Harry had painstakingly glued it on strand by strand, trimming carefully with safety scissors until the little angel had a flowing wig. He had already painted it as well, giving it rosy cheeks and lips. In one small clay hand, he had glued a toothpick for a magic wand, down the shaft of which he had stenciled a tiny design until it looked very similar to the wand she had used earlier. And in the other hand, was a tiny sprig of green construction paper holly with red sequin berries. It was really quite incredible detail work for a nine-year-old Rose thought admiringly. The shorn locks of hair had definitely been worth it to see the look of pride on his face now.

She kept him company while he crafted the dress and wings and carefully glued the little emeralds into place. And even though she offered to help him, he steadfastly refused, insisting that he had to finish it all by himself for his Christmas wish to come true.

"There! Holly's all done!" he finally said, proudly holding up the little angel to show his teacher.

"Holly?"

"That's what I named my angel."

"Well Holly is just beautiful Harry. In fact she's perfect." Rose declared, and was immediately rewarded by a radiant smile from the small boy. "Except... you didn't put a hole in the top for the ribbon. How are you going to hang it from the tree?" she asked puzzled as she examined the ornament.

"Oh I couldn't do that! Holly needs to be smart. If I put a hole in her head, all her brains will leak out and she might forget all about my wish. So I tied the ribbon around her waist instead. It's better there anyway. Won't get in the way of her wings when she flies." He said with perfect nine-year-old logic.

"Ouch! I see." Rose nodded in agreement just as the clock struck five o'clock, and his cousin Dudley lumbered in the door, a sticky half eaten lollypop in one hand and a small, slightly torn and smashed gift wrapped box of candy in the other.

"Mum says I was supposed to give you this Christmas gift, even if you aren't my regular teacher. She says it's polite. I ate one of the pieces. Sorry. Didn't know." He said thrusting it at her, and signaling impatiently to Harry. "Mum waiting. Come on!"

Rose could hear Dudley's irritating sing-song of 'you're going to get it... you're going to get it...' as Harry followed him reluctantly out the door. She sighed and wished again that there were something she could do to help him. He obviously didn't feel loved where he was,

and every child deserved at least that. Suddenly the door swung back open as Harry ran back in and pressed the angel hard into her hand.

“Here. Please take her Mrs. Krueger.” He said, his large green eyes pleading.

“But Harry! You worked so hard on her. Don’t you want to hang Holly on your own tree so you can make your Christmas wish?”

“I don’t... I don’t really have a tree ma’am. And Holly already knows what I wished. I told her. And if it does come true... I want you to have my angel to keep forever. If I take her with me, Dudley will just smash her again when I’m not there to protect her. Will you... will you... ?”

“Will I what Harry?” Rose asked puzzled by his wording.

“...will you put her on your tree?” he asked shyly.

“Of course I will!”

“You won’t forget?”

“Absolutely not. I won’t forget.”

“It’s really really important she flies on Christmas Eve... do you... do you promise?”

“Yes I promise Harry. I won’t forget. I will put her on my tree. Way up high. Just like you want.”

“Thank you Mrs. Krueger.”

“For what Harry?”

“...for... it doesn’t matter...” and without finishing the thought, he flashed her a brilliant smile and then turned and ran out. Going to the window Rose could see him climbing into the back seat of a car just as Dudley reached over and punched him in the arm hard enough to send him flying backwards to land in the slush filled gutter. Dudley

yelled out “Mum! He hit me!” and a high pitched voice from the front seat responded by screeching at Harry to quit causing trouble and to hurry it up and get in.

Rose shook her head and looked down at the patched together angel in her hand. Some people never saw and appreciated the gifts they had right in front of them. It was so sad. Gathering up her things and tidying up the room, she turned out the lights and locked the door. It was the end of her last day teaching here, by the time the Christmas break would be over, her new baby would have arrived, and the permanent teacher would be back. She wouldn’t really miss it, well... except for one small dark haired boy that reminded her so much of an extremely serious version of her very un-serious Jimmy.

All through the bus ride home Rose clutched the angel in her hand and thought about her little student, wishing over and over again that somehow she could help him, and wishing over and over again that someday she would find her missing child. She may have forgotten a lot of things but she was convinced deep down in her heart that if the child she gave birth to were dead, then as it’s mother, she would know it, amnesia or not. She made up her mind. She was going to force Jimmy to talk about it once and for all. With her magic starting to come back, he just had to see that she was strong enough now to deal with it, no matter what the Doctors said.

The next several days getting ready for Christmas and the impending birth of the baby were hectic ones and the little angel lay discarded on the counter. Rose had only meant to drop it there momentarily, when she had first arrived home to their shabby little first floor walk-up flat, but right after she put it down, the active baby had kicked all the air out of her lungs unexpectedly, driving all thought but that of breathing out of her mind. Then over the days following, things started slowly piling up, hiding it from sight altogether, until it was finally Christmas Eve and the little angel lay forgotten under a stack of junk mail and unpaid bills, just like its maker who lay curled up in his lonely little cupboard, once again forgotten by his relatives and by Father Christmas.

Cuddled up on the couch with Jimmy in front of the Christmas tree, a small fire crackling in the fireplace, with no more preparations to

make, and no where else to be, Rose sighed contentedly as he gently massaged that spot in her back that the baby liked to sit on. Over the past few days whenever Rose had tried to broach the subject of the past, Jimmy deftly sidestepped the topic, each and every time. But now was the perfect time to bring it up again...

"Jimmy?"

"Yes Rosie?"

"We need to talk... no change that... you need to talk."

"Sure, what do you want me to talk about?"

"You know."

"Anything but that."

"No, nothing else but that. I mean it Jimmy. It's what I want for Christmas. I want to know. I need to know."

"But the doctor's said..."

"You said it yourself Jimmy, the doctors were muggle doctors, and I'm magical. I know I didn't believe you at first, but I do now. And I have got to think that it makes a difference. Now that my magic has started to come back, I can handle it. I know I can. And I need to know what happened before this baby comes. I need to know so I can prevent what happened before from happening again."

"Don't worry love, it won't happen again."

"How do you know?"

"The circumstances are different Rose."

"You may know that Jimmy, but I don't. And unless you tell me everything that happened, it will eat me alive. Not knowing is slowly killing me. It's far worse this way. You've got to see that. Don't you?"

she raised her head off his shoulder, her eyes meeting his as she pleaded.

Jimmy had never been able to deny those emerald eyes anything, so against his better judgment he finally gave in.

“Okay love. Okay...” he said sighing and patting her head back down to his shoulder. “Get comfy. It’s a long story. Now let’s see... where to start... okay, I got it. A long time ago, in a castle far, far, away...”

“Jimmy! I want the truth not a fairy tale!”

“You want the story? Yes?”

She nodded emphatically.

“Then let me tell it my way. Now where was I? Ahem... oh right... in a castle far, far, away called Hogwarts, lived a beautiful princess...”

“...beautiful?...”

“Quit interrupting...”

“Just asking...”

“You want this or not?”

“Um, yes. Sorry. Continue... you were at the beautiful princess.”

“AHA! You just wanted me to say that again!”

“...maybe...”

“Okay... an extremely beautiful princess, probably the most beautiful princess in the entire kingdom, in fact she was so beautiful....”

“...that’s enough. Now get on with it...”

“Oh right... anyway there was also a clever dashing handsome prince...”

“ Ooo... modest aren't we?”

“Quite so! I could have thrown in a couple more adjectives like brilliant and athletic but as you say, I am modest. Anyway, the Prince and Princess had many grand adventures in the castle with their merry band of Marauders and eventually the two fell in love, married, and went to live in a little rose covered cottage in Godric's Hollow. But while the Prince and Princess were happy in their little cottage, over the horizon a dark storm was brewing. An evil mad power hungry wizard who wanted everyone to bow to his will started gathering followers and troops. The Prince and Princess knew that living life under the control of the Evil Wizard would not be a life worth living so they joined the fight against him on the side of the light. They faced him three times and lived.”

“They were very brave.” Rose said with a shudder of cold.

‘Yes they were my love... yes they were...” Jimmy replied pulling up a blanket around her shoulders and holding her tight. “Now even though a war was waging the Prince and Princess were so much in love that soon they were joined by the most beautiful...” Jimmy's voice grew thick and started to stick in his throat, “...the most beautiful baby boy...”

“A son? We had a son?”

“...shush... this is hard enough... questions later... anyway they had the most beautiful baby boy in the entire kingdom. The Princelet was bright, smart, and happy. He had his father's good looks and his mother's vivid eyes, and the Prince and Princess loved him very much. He was the best baby, not only in the kingdom, but also in the entire wizarding world. He could even fly his little toy broom at just one year old! He was a natural seeker.” Jimmy said with the obvious pride of a father for his first born son before growing serious again, “The Evil Wizard heard about the little princelet and decided he was a threat that had to be eliminated at all costs.”

"But he was just a little baby! How could he be a threat to a grown man?!" Rose protested in fear for the son she didn't remember but loved anyway.

"Because of a bloody prophecy!" Jimmy swore, his face growing hard. "The prophecy said that a baby born at the end of July would be marked as the Evil Wizard's equal, and the Evil Wizard was VERY evil and didn't want any equals, of ANY age or size."

"But what if it wasn't the Princelet the prophecy meant! Couldn't it have been wrong! Did it name him specifically?"

"No, not specifically but there were other indicators in the prophecy that narrowed it down, such as the child being born to parents who had faced the Evil Wizard three times and lived."

"...the Prince and the Princess..." Rose breathed.

"...yes, the Prince and Princess. There was only one other couple with a child born towards the end of July that matched the same description..."

"There was another?" Rose asked hopefully.

"Yes one other couple, very good friends of the Prince and Princess, the Duke and Duchess who also fought on the side of the light and faced the Evil Wizard three times and lived. Their son was born just a few days before the Princelet. But even with all his knowledge, the leader of the light side, the powerful wise and good wizard Dumbledore, did not know which of the two baby boys was the one mentioned by the prophecy. So to protect both boys from the Evil Wizard, he sent both couples and their babies into hiding. Each couple had a secret keeper who was the only one who knew where they were. The Evil Wizard and his minions..."

"... he had minions? Is that like flying monkeys?" Rose said trying to lighten the dread that she felt building in his voice.

"Ha! Very much so, or at least flying bats..." he said darkly with meaning, "...but quit changing the subject. You were the one who

wanted this, not me. Now that we've come this far let's finish it okay? That is... if you're okay. I'll stop if you need me too. But if I do, I don't think I can start again."

"... I'm ... I'm all right. I want to finish it." Rose said in a small voice.

Jimmy feeling her tremble in his arms asked, "Are you sure?"

"... yes..."

"Okay then... the Evil Wizard and his minions searched all over for the two babies. His minions set a trap, lured the Duke and Duchess out of hiding, and tried to force them to divulge the location of their child. When they refused, the minions retaliated by torturing them with unforgivable curses until they were irreversibly insane. Unable to locate the baby of the Duke and Duchess, the Evil Wizard focused his attention on the Princelet. He searched across the kingdom and offered great rewards to anyone who would reveal his location. The Prince and Princess thought they were safe because they trusted their secret keeper. He was one of the four Marauders, a brother, Wormtail, and they thought they were very clever in picking him at the last minute over the other two. He was the one least likely to be chosen as secret keeper, so he was also the one least likely to be sought out by the Evil Wizard for information. They told no one of the change, but little did they know that they placed their faith in the only one of the Marauders who had already pledged his allegiance to the Evil Wizard, that Wormtail was also the least likely to remain loyal."

"...he...he was a minion?"

"Yes and a rat to boot. Anyway, he told the Evil Wizard where the Prince and Princess and their little Princelet were, and in the dark of Halloween night, he came. The one thing that the Evil Wizard didn't know was that someone else was also there that night."

"Who?"

"Caradoc Dearborn and his American fiancée Jasmine. They had just arrived from America. Since Wormtail, the secret keeper had failed to return; the Prince had used his invisibility cloak to venture out to

gather more supplies, and had run into Carrie and Jasmine just arriving. On the spur of the moment, the Prince invited them to come back with him for dinner to celebrate their engagement. When the Evil Wizard arrived, he exploded the door and Carrie, trying to stop him, died instantly in the blast. The Prince shouted at the Princess to take the Princelet and to run, as he too fell under the evil wizard's curses. ... Now, as the Prince was rendered unconscious, with near fatal injuries, the rest of this sequence is just what I surmised. I pieced it together from the sketchy bits the doctors at the Sanatorium remembered being told when we were left there..."

"...go on then, surmise away..."

"...ahem... the Evil Wizard climbed the stairs and entered the nursery. The Princess and her friend Jasmine hadn't had time to escape and tried to shield the Princelet, but it was to no avail. The Evil Wizard first killed Jasmine, and then turned his wand on the Princess and the Princelet... you still okay? You're shaking..."

"...we're almost done... go on..."

"...the Evil Wizard pointed his wand at them and... and... and they fell too. He then set fire to the cottage and left with his dark mark glowing in the air above, as a sign of his triumph."

"But how? How is it then that the Prince and Princess are still alive?"

"Ah... yes. Naturally you would want to know that part too."

"Naturally."

"Well the originally designated secret keeper, Padfoot..."

"Padfoot?"

"Yes Padfoot, but that's another long story... anyway Padfoot arrived at the cottage just minutes after the Evil Wizard left, and he valiantly fought his way in through the flames. Finding the Prince on the ground floor first, he apparated him out to safety and immediately returned to search for the Princess and the Princelet. When he

searched the nursery, it was a disaster zone, the crib had been blown up, and the room aflame with fiendfyre. He found Jasmine's burned body, and despaired at first that it was the Princess. But as he turned to leave, he was stopped by a small sound and found the Princess moaning unconscious. The remains of the crib had completely covered her and protected her from the flames. There was nothing left of the Princelet though. The evil wizard had... had... blown him to bits as he slept in his little crib." Jimmy finished with a sob in a rush of words. "Padfoot apparated the Princess out just as the remainder of the room crumpled under the heat. He then took both the Prince and the Princess to a quiet little sanatorium in Germany to recover, leaving enough gold to cover the cost of their care for quite a while."

"What happened then?" This part of the story she knew but after the horrendous tale she had just heard, she wanted to hear the comforting words of familiar memories.

"The Prince recovered first. He was in a coma for three years, but finally awoke to find the world and friends he knew gone, but his Princess still safe. It took three more years before the Prince succeeded in kissing his sleeping Princess awake, but when he did, all her memories were gone. The Prince set about wooing his Princess all over again, until she finally succumbed to his charms..." (small snort of laughter from Rose) "... let me correct that... she succumbed to his irresistible charms, and then she married him for the second time. And they lived happily ever after."

"Questions now?"

"Sure." Jimmy sighed in resignation, "...shoot."

"Why didn't anyone ever come looking for the Prince and Princess?"

"They mistook the burned bodies of Carrie and Jasmine for the Prince and Princess. No one knew that the pair was there that night, or that Carrie had just gotten engaged. It was a surprise, a whirlwind romance, and he was just bringing her to England that day to introduce her to his family. In the scant articles that I could find in the back issues of the German newspapers, it just said that Carrie disappeared without a trace. No one ever knew why or how, they

thought he might have run away rather than fight. No one even knew about Jasmine, there was no mention of her at all.”

“What happened to Padfoot?”

“I don’t know. After he left us at Hospital, he never returned. I couldn’t find any articles about him. I’m afraid that the Evil Wizard took him out too. Coverage in German muggle papers didn’t really have much news of the wizarding world in England, there was a report of a dozen or so muggles who were killed the next day that I thought might have been related, but the reporter said it was being attributed to a gas line explosion or some such thing. I found that small article about Carrie just by chance, it was only there because his relatives were using every resource, even muggle ones, to search for him.”

“What about the German wizarding newspapers?”

“They might have had something, but I couldn’t very well go into the Wizarding world to find out could I? Everyone thought we were dead and while we were still recovering, it was safer to let it stay that way.”

“Is it time to go back now? Maybe if I see Hogwarts, I’ll remember for real.”

“Maybe it is. Now that you have your magic back, it’s going to be harder to keep hidden, especially until you have yours under control. Hogwarts might just be the place for that. And I would like to know what happened to Padfoot, and to let Carrie’s folks know what really happened to him and Jasmine, and that he died a hero, not a deserter.”

“You know... I can feel the memories right there, just under the surface... just like... just like my magic.” Rose fingered her wand thoughtfully and remembered the warm tingly feeling as her magic returned while fixing the angel ornament.

“OH NO!” Rose gasped and sat up straight, staring at the tree.

“What is it? Is the baby coming?”

“NO! THE ANGEL!”

“The angel?”

“The ornament! The angel ornament! I promised to put it on the tree. I almost forgot and it’s Christmas Eve. And I can’t blame this one on amnesia!” Rose got up and started tossing things around in a frantic search. “It’s got to be here somewhere! Help me look!”

Twenty minutes later, the flat looked like a whirlwind had blown through it, but the little ornament was held high in Jimmy triumphant hand. “Got it!” he crowed, happy to see Rose smiling again.

“Put it at the very top Jimmy. As high up as you can reach.”

“The kid really did a nice job on it. It’s got a wand and everything.”

“Yes he did.” Rose agreed, steadying him as he stretched up to hang the ornament precariously from the highest limb.

“Hey! What’s this?” Jimmy asked as a small piece of tightly folded paper, tied shut with a string, dislodged and fell from the ornament as it started to swing when he let go of it.

“Likely it’s his Christmas wish, better put it back.”

“But shouldn’t we read it first?” Jimmy asked, incredulous that she would even consider passing up the opportunity to open up a secret that was shut with a string tied into a bow.

“... probably not...” Rose hesitated between safeguarding the little boy’s privacy and her curiosity to find out what he might have wished for that was so important to him.

“Ah... come on Rosie! You really like this kid, maybe it’ll be something we can grant. It’ll be fun! We can pretend to be Christmas elves!” Jimmy cajoled.

“... well...”

“Pleeeeeaaaasssseeee?” he wheedled dropping down to his knees in front of her with hands clasped to plead. Then, putting on his most charming puppy dog eyed look he added, “Look! It even has a bow! And you know me and bows...”

“... well... I don’t know if it will be something that we can fulfill. You should read his essay first. You’ll see what I mean.”

“The essay? The one that caused all the problems?”

“Yes. The essay.” Rose affirmed, pulling out the paper from her school satchel. “I brought it with me. It just seemed too personal to leave behind where just anyone might find it.”

Jimmy was quiet as he silently read it through to himself. “The kid is nine?”

“Yes.”

“Then he’s about the same age our son would have been.”

‘You know he reminds me a lot of you Jimmy.’

“The kid? He does? How?”

“Oh, just the expression on his face sometimes, how he moves his hands, and how his hair sticks up in the back... just like yours.” She said fondly running her fingers through his hair.

“You know the hair is my trademark... not sure I like this kid encroaching on my turf.”

“Your turf?”

“Yeah... first he goes after my woman... and then my hair... what’s next?”

“Excuse me! Your turf? Your woman?”

“Well... yeah...” Jimmy replied as Rose whacked him with a pillow. “Hey! Watch it! I’m sorry... I’m sorry.”

“You ought to be!”

“I am! I am! But I still want to read the kid’s wish,” he whined. “I didn’t like what you told me about his bully of a cousin, and that bit about the cupboard bothers me.”

“Cupboard?”

“Yeah hon... didn’t you read the whole essay?”

“Yes, to the class. But I admit I was so distressed, when I realized how much I was embarrassing him, that I don’t remember all the words.”

“At the very end, he said that then he ‘wouldn’t be stuck in a cupboard all alone anymore’. I don’t like the sound of that at all. Why would he be stuck in a cupboard? Do you think his cousin shoves him in one from time to time? Like the time the Marauders locked Snape in the Gryffindor cloak closet for spying on us?”

“You did WHAT!?”

“It was all in good... fun?” he faltered at the dark look on her face.

“Did Severus have fun too?”

“Well... probably not... I was just jealous,” he tried to justify. “Wait a minute now! You remember Snape just like that? It took you an entire year to remember me!”

“Jealous again?” She teased, then seeing the hurt look on his face added, “...sorry Jimmy. It’s just that things are starting to come back a little. I’m sorry I gave you such a bad time for an entire year.”

“Well, it wasn’t so bad... and wooing you all over again was kind of fun. Besides the first time it took me seven years, so I guess doing it in one the second time wasn’t bad at all.”

“Now you’re the one changing the subject... back to Severus and the cloak closet.”

“That was when you were friends with him, and wouldn’t even talk to me. I... I guess we were bullies... just like this kid’s cousin... when we go back I’ll have to apologize to Snape for that. I don’t like bullies, and I am ashamed to admit I was ever one too.” Jimmy replied sheepishly. “But what do you think it means for this kid? ...‘the cupboard’?”

“I don’t know Jimmy... I don’t remember reading that before. I think you’re right though let’s read the wish. Until we go back to the wizarding world we don’t have much money, but maybe there is something we can do. After all, he didn’t really ask for much from Father Christmas, and from his comments, I don’t think he’ll be getting anything at all from his relatives. I bet I have an extra notebook and some colored pencils and maybe even some drawing paper around here somewhere. And there is that old Winnie-the-Pooh storybook on the shelf that was left by the previous tenants, that he might like... and look here! I can reuse this bit of wrapping paper from the box my nightgown was in, it’s not too wrinkled... and here is some ribbon to tie it with... you’re right Jimmy... let’s read the last wish too.” Rose decided as she rifled through the haphazard piles in her treasure hunt.

“That’s the Marauder’s Christmas spirit!” Jimmy crowed gleefully in anticipation as he finally got his way. Settling Rose down next to him on the comfy couch, he tucked the blanket around her feet while she wrapped the little pile of gifts. Fingering the little square of paper contemplatively, he stopped tugging at the string for a minute and asked, “But how are we going to get them to him? The gifts, that is... do you know where he lives?”

“I hadn’t thought about that. I don’t know. Well... after Christmas break is over I could take them to the school and tell him that Father Christmas got confused because his angel was on our tree, so he left his presents at our house instead. Better late than never, right?”

“Right! Now let’s see what else he wants...” Jimmy said unfolding the tight little square of paper and beginning to read out loud to Rose...

Dear Christkind,

I’m writing to you this year instead of Father Christmas, because I’ve asked him every year and he won’t grant my wish. He thinks I’m bad, so he only brings gifts to Dudley. But since you’re in heaven with my parents, instead of the North Pole, I thought maybe they could tell you that I’ve tried to be extra good this year. Mrs. Figg says she is sure they are watching over me from heaven, so they would know it’s true. So you can ask them, okay?

Anyway, I asked my Christmas Angel to fly this wish up to you, so in case you do think I was good enough, you would know what I want for Christmas. I know you can’t bring my mummy and daddy back to me since they died in a car crash and everything, so I was wondering if you could please take me to them instead. Please? All I want for Christmas is to die too so I can be with my family again. I just want to go home.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Harry James Potter

“Oh Merlin!” Jimmy swore jumping up, his face pale and his hands shaking. “Where does he live Rose? WHERE?!?”

“I told you Jimmy... I... I don’t know...”

“Well we’ve got to find out! Don’t you see? It has to be him! You said he had hair just like mine and he’s nine, and his name is Harry James Potter.”

At the confused look on his wife’s face, Jimmy knelt down, took her hands in his, and looked deep into her vivid emerald green eyes.

“If you’re ever going to remember the past, please... now is the time... your name is...”

“Rose Krueger.” She said promptly. “That’s the one thing I didn’t forget.” But then seeing the flush on Jimmy’s face added suspiciously, “...or did I?”

“No... it is Rose... it’s just that ‘Rose’ isn’t all of it...” he said taking a deep breath, “...it’s really Lily Rose Evans Potter. And I’m James Potter.”

“Potter? But I thought our name was Krueger...?”

“When I came out of the coma they were calling me Herr Krueger. Krueger is the German equivalent of the English name Potter, Padfoot must have given the Doctors that name to protect us until we woke up. I decided it was handy for our disguise so I just kept using it. And I gave them your middle name for you since you were a little out of it.”

As the final piece of her jigsaw memory clicked into place, it opened the floodgates and the past finally broke through. Lily gasped for breath with realization as the details of her prior life spun thorough her mind like a kaleidoscope out of control. “I’m Lily... you’re James... and then Harry is...”

“Yes, we named him after your father, Harry Evans, and after me. Rose... I mean Lily... Lily we named our son Harry... Harry James Potter.” he said holding out the Christmas wish and pointing at Harry’s signature for emphasis.

“Oh my gods! I am such a horrible mother! He’s been in my class for a month... and I never knew? He’s right! I do have a hole in my head.”

“What?”

“Never mind. The point is that he was right in front of me this whole time and I never recognized him! And I always thought I would...” Lily wailed, her voice trailing off in hiccupy sobs.

"I think you did... down inside. Why else do you think he got to you like that?"

"... but Jimmy... no James... James, he thinks were dead! In a car crash! And... my baby... our son... is... alive! But how could he be? The Evil Wizard...?"

"I don't know... all I can think of is that between the time Padfoot rescued me and when he went back and found you, someone else must have found and gotten Harry out of the house before it burned. Somehow, he must have survived the attack too. But what ever happened, all it means right now is that he's still alive! Lily he's alive! That's all that matters! Now all we have to do is find him."

"Dudley! Dudley is his cousin! My sister! Oh my gods! She married Vernon and they had a son named Dudley! He's with my sister James! Harry is with my sister Petunia!"

"Where does she live? We'll go get him back right now!"

"I... I don't know where she lives... but her married name is Dursley..."

James ran to the phone book, flipped through it rapidly, but ended up throwing it in the fire in disgust.

"Apparently Dursley didn't list their number."

"I know James! The school! They will have the address in the office. But..."

"But what Lils?"

"... but... we'd have to break in. I had to turn in my key when I left."

"That's thinking like a Marauder! Let's go! I'm not going to leave our son feeling unloved, and wishing to die, for one more minute longer than I have to."

James wrapped his arms around her and apparated the two of them into the darkened school.

“Thanks James... this way! But be quiet! There’s a guard!”

Lily ran down the hall as fast as her pregnant body would allow but stopped short at the door to the office.

“It’s locked James!” she said rattling the handle and banging on the door in desperation.

“That’s why you married a wizard Madame. We can come in handy from time to time. Please allow me.”

As Lily stood aside, James pulled out his wand, performed a quick ‘Alohomora’ unlocking spell. He was rewarded by a soft ‘click’ as the door swung open. Lily pushed past him and did the same to the student records file cabinet.

“You’re a quick study Lily.” James said admiringly, grinning as he watched his normally tidy wife dump the files haphazardly on the floor in her search for the right one.

“It’s all coming back. And... I GOT IT!” she returned the grin and waved a paper victoriously, “Number 4, Privet Drive. Let’s go!”

“And no time too soon Lily, I think the security guard is coming.” Lily ran over and grasped James around the waist as he wrapped his arms tightly around her again and turning on the spot, apparating them away to reappear in a blink of an eye later, on a corner of a quiet suburb. “I don’t think the guard saw us, but he will certainly see the mess we left behind.”

“I don’t care James. We didn’t take anything, so they’ll just write it off to vandals. I just want to get my baby boy and go home. Which way is Number 4? They all look alike. Figures my sister would live somewhere like this. She always did put a high value on ‘normality’ and being the same as everyone else.”

“Number 11... Number 9... this way! It’s on the other side of the street... Number 8... Number 6... there it is! Number 4!” James said excitedly, “And the lights are still on. Let’s ring the bell shall we?”

“Let’s!” Lily nodded taking his arm as he guided her up the very straight walk of the very square house to the very plain front door with the very large ‘4’ smack in the center of it. Taking a deep breath, she pushed the bell. From inside she could hear her sister’s high pitched complaining voice and an equally complaining low growling one that could only belong to her husband Vernon.

“Get the door and tell them we aren’t buying!”

Lily and James held their breath in anticipation, and simultaneously let it out in disappointment as the door swung open to reveal Dudley instead of Harry.

“It’s my teacher Mum! Mrs. Krueger. Do you still want me to tell her to go away?” Dudley yelled out upon seeing who was there.

“No! No! Dudley... show her in, show her in.”

Dudley didn’t budge, but yelled a second time to confirm, “She’s with a really strange looking man wearing a funny dress Mum! Do you still want me to invite her in?”

James would have drawn his wand, and angrily pushed past his rude nephew at this point, if Lily hadn’t put a restraining hand on his arm. “Not that way James.” She whispered in his ear. “This is my sister’s house. Behave.”

“I will, if they will,” he whispered back as Petunia Dursley hurried to the door to check on the ‘really strange looking’ man.

“Hello Petunia! Aren’t you going to invite us in?” Lily asked smiling at her sister.

“Lily?” Petunia gasped.

“In the flesh.” She answered brightly.

"But you're... you're dead. And you! You're James! You're dead too!" Petunia said faintly.

"Then I would suggest you invite us in quickly, dear sister-in-law. Wouldn't do to have your neighbors seeing dead people loitering about on your front porch, now would it?"

James guided Lily by the shoulders as he pushed her past the stunned Petunia and into the living room, where a red faced Vernon Dursley started sputtering at his evening being so rudely interrupted.

"What's this?" Vernon demanded. "Who are you? You're those kind of people, aren't you!?!"

"If by 'those kind of people', you mean 'relatives' then yes we are sir. I don't believe we had the pleasure to meet before, we're James and Lily Potter, and you must be my brother-in-law Vernon." James said congenially, introducing himself and holding out his hand to shake Vernon's, only to have it totally ignored. "Right-o..." he said pulling it back. "So... Vernon, lovely home and family you have here... but you look like a man of few words so enough of this small talk... just tell me where my son Harry is, and we'll be off. He doesn't seem to be helping you with the tree..." James said observing Dudley who, once he found out his teacher and the funny dressed man were really his Aunt and Uncle, and relatives, long-lost or otherwise being exceedingly boring, had abandoned the decorations in favor of occupying himself with opening a few gifts early. "...and might I inquire as to just why he isn't helping you decorate? And where is his Christmas stocking?" he asked, noting only three, with the names of the Dursleys on them, hanging from the mantle.

"The frea... uh... the boy is rather stand-offish. He doesn't really like participating in 'family' things, so I sent him to bed early. Why don't you come back tomorrow? It would be a shame to wake him now." Petunia hedged with a nervous titter and her back to the hall.

"Nonsense! I'll just go wake him." James said sprinting up the stairs. "Lily, you sit down for a minute and get off your feet. I'll be right back down."

"I want to thank you Petunia..." Lily started to say as she sat down before Vernon butted in, cutting her off.

"Well I should hope so! Just foisting your child on us for eight years without a word! You would not believe all the trouble he's caused!"

"I'm sorry Vernon... but I've met Harry. And you're right. I don't believe that sweet boy was that much trouble..."

"SWEET? He's... he's.... abnormal! He's a freak! Just like you and your husband!" Petunia bristled.

"Lily! I can't find him!" James said his face thundering to match his tone of voice and he pounded back down the stairs. "Where is he Dursley? There are four bedrooms upstairs and my son isn't in any of them! And I couldn't find even one picture of him anywhere in the entire house! WHERE IS HE? I WANT MY SON! AND I WANT HIM NOW!" James ended with his wand drawn and pressed against a vein in Vernon's bulging neck.

"...Gaaggaaaa..." was the only sound that came from Vernon's throat.

"Dudley?" Lily asked urgently taking another tack before James did something they would all regret, "... where is your cousin Harry?"

"Oh, he's in his cupboard. That way... under the stairs... where else would he be?" Dudley shrugged nonchalantly before going back to the toy he had just unwrapped, as if having a cousin living in a cupboard under the stairs was the normal course of business for any family.

"His cupboard?" James said softly looking at Lily with pain in his eyes.

"...under the stairs?" Lily said returning the look before fixing her sister with an icy glare.

"Yeah... he's been in there ever since school got out. He's being punished for punching me in the arm."

“But... that... that was three days ago! And I saw it!” Lily gasped at the injustice, “You punched him!”

Dudley just snickered.

Looking at James, Lily knew she had to act quickly before James did something to wipe the nasty smirk off his nephew’s face. “James? Please... they’re not worth it... Please... just find Harry...”

James let Vernon go with a shove and ran to the hallway, and upon locating the little door to the cupboard, felt sick in the pit of his stomach. It was outfitted with a deadbolt and a small air vent. Both closed and locked. He said a few curses under his breath as he pointed his wand at the lock and it fell away. The door swung open to reveal a tiny cramped space furnished only with a little cot, upon which a small dark haired boy laid curled up on the thin bare mattress. The child was so pale, and so still, that James heart skipped a beat in fear they were too late. He knelt down and carefully scooped his son up in his arms and was relieved to feel his breath on his neck as he held him close to his chest. He was barely breathing, but he was breathing. His pulse wasn’t very steady, but at least it was there. James sobbed in relief. It had been so long, but he finally had his son in his arms again!

Backing out of the cupboard, he carried Harry into the living room. “I found him Lily, let’s get his things and get out of here, I don’t want him to ever have to come back here again, for anything. You’ll pay for this Dursley!” He threatened his brother-in-law darkly.

“Pay? PAY? PAY?” Vernon squealed in indignation. “YOU Sir are the one who should pay US!”

“Pay you for what for Dursley?” James returned angrily.

“For taking care of him all these years, out of the kindness of our hearts... without one penny from you or any of your kind I might add. That’s what for!”

“Fine. You want money? I’ll get you money. Just hand over my son’s things and you’ll get your bloody money.”

When Vernon just turned red at this statement, and Petunia turned pale, Lily got out her wand and sweeping it around her in a circle said a summoning spell 'Accio Harry's things!' Nothing moved.

"Dudley?"

"Yeah?" he asked in disinterest, not even looking up from his toy this time.

"Where are your cousin's things?"

"What things?"

"You know... his clothes... his books... his toys?"

"Freaks don't have no things." Dudley replied matter-of-factly.

"Any..." Lily automatically corrected him, before realizing what he said. "What do you mean... he doesn't have any things?"

"Mum and Dad say that freaks don't deserve nothin' because their bad. But I'm so good that I have an extra bedroom just for my broken toys!"

"Oh really?" Lily replied raising her eyebrows, her emerald green eyes flashing dangerously in anger.

"Come on Lily..." James said softly, cuddling his son tighter, "... you were right. They aren't worth it. We have Harry back, that's what matters. And I think sooner we get him out of here the better."

"Good riddance to bad rubbish I say!" Petunia spat out. "Take him and go. This has never been his home!"

"We will." Lily said sadly, as she got up and went to stand beside James and Harry. "You know Petunia, no matter what has come between us, I still love you. You're my sister, I always will. And if our situations had been reversed, I would have treasured being able to

raise Dudley for you. I'm sorry you didn't feel the same way. I'm ready now James... let's take our son home."

"With pleasure my love." James said holding Harry close to him with one arm, and Lily close with the other. Then, as the wards fell around Number 4 Privet Drive, the little family disappeared with a 'crack' of displaced air.

"Let me hold him." Lily pleaded as soon as they were back safe in their flat. James settled her on the couch and sat down next to her, with Harry sandwiched snugly in between, then tucked the soft warm blanket around all three of them. Lily felt Harry's forehead and raised her worried eyes to James. "Is he alright James? He's so pale and cold."

"I think so Lily... I just don't think they've fed him lately. He was locked in that cupboard without even any water. From the look on your sister's face, I'd say they forgot he was even in there until we showed up. We just need to warm him up, and then get some food and water into him. He's going to be okay... but I think we got there just in time to make sure that his last Christmas wish really wasn't his last."

"Oh James... what if... what if we hadn't read the wish? What if... we hadn't made it in time? By the time they remembered him it might have been too late! It had already been three days!"

"But we did Lily, we did."

"Thanks to an angel." Lily said brushing the hair from his face, and after giving him a long lingering kiss, bent her head down to give the top of Harry's head a matching one.

"I guess I don't mind the kid encroaching on my turf after all." James said fondly adding his kiss to hers, "...maybe we ought to cuddle a little closer? Warm him up a bit faster?" He added hopefully.

"Maybe... but only for a few minutes. I think we'll need to leave again very soon."

“Leave? But we just got Harry home!”

“True, but Harry had one more wish on his list, and I think someone else wants to be the one to grant it.”

“I thought we had all the wishes covered... paper, pencils, paperback, and of course the biggie... parents... what else was there?”

“A baby sister to play with.” She replied tenderly. “I think that Holly Jasmine Potter... wants to join us too.”

“...baby sister? It’s a girl? Are you sure? And she’s coming? Now?!?!”

“... yes, yes, yes, yes, and a very BIG yes!”

While Lily and James were exchanging kisses over his head, Harry reached up and straightened his glasses. He had started to drift back into consciousness when he heard his teacher’s voice in his Aunt’s living room. But it felt so good to be held by the tall man who had his arms wrapped protectively around him and smelled so comforting and so familiar, that he hadn’t wanted to say anything in fear that if he did, the man might realize what he was doing and put him back in the cupboard and leave him there. So he kept his mouth closed, his eyes shut tight, and pretended to still be asleep.

He wasn’t sure where he was anymore, things seemed to happen really fast and then he felt all squishy and a little dizzy for a few moments, and now all he knew was that he was somewhere warm and comfy, and that he definitely wasn’t in his lonely little cupboard anymore. And better yet, he couldn’t hear Dudley or Aunt Petunia or Uncle Vernon at all! As his eyes came into focus, a flutter of snowy white wings from the top of a tree, decorated with strings of popped corn and cranberries, caught his eye. His patchwork angel, her flowing red hair and diaphanous blue gown glowing in the firelight, sent him a sparkling emerald green wink.

He mouthed a silent ‘thank you’ to the little angel and then sighed contentedly as he snuggled back down between his teacher and the tall man. They said that they were his mummy and daddy, and that they were even going to give him a baby sister to play with!

His angel had granted his Christmas wish.

Everything was perfect.

He had a family.

He was home.

~fin~

A Patchwork Valentine

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or anything else that may seem familiar. In fact, I own less and less every day.

Author: DracaDelirus

Dedication: For my friend Dark Jack who has been giving me vocabulary lessons and who supplied the definitions for the true meaning of Friendship and Love. Thank you Jack! :) And for my friend swanpride and also for Tati1 who both wanted a sequel next Christmas to Patchwork Angel. Not sure about next year so I thought I better do it now. Didn't want to disappoint.

Explanation: Since this Valentine's Day story sequel isn't really a stand alone by itself one-shot (because parts of this don't make sense without the Christmas one first), I added it as a second chapter to my Christmas story and changed the name of the Christmas one to 'Patchwork Wishes' to include both together. Sincere regrets if this was the wrong way to post it when I had already marked the Christmas one as complete. If this is against any FF rules please let me know so I can fix it.

My Valentine Wish

Tokens of love here and there
Vivid pink and red hearts
For sale everywhere.
Greeting cards and confections too
Lots of tasty treats
For you-know-who!

Valentines with hearts and lace
Bearing poetic words
Of a warm embrace.
These I'd buy for you with care
Choosing the perfect one
No expense I'd spare.

Alas, fortune is not my friend

With empty pockets
I must now contend.
Since I can't buy you valentines,
My humble offer
Is this wish of mine.

My Valentine wish for you
Is love and happiness
To help see you through.
May you be able to face
Whatever fate brings you
No troubles to chase.

May you be healthy and wise
And enjoying your life
Good friends at your side.
Just one thing please, if you have time...
Could you also be
My Valentine?

- Happy Saint Valentine's Day! -
DracaDelirus

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rowhctaP

"Ugh! Gerroff me!" Harry's muffled shouts could be heard coming from underneath the hulking lump that was his cousin Dudley. Harry tried to stifle his rising anger as he remembered his mum and dad's warning about not getting too angry and accidentally using magic against 'people-who-don't-deserve-it-because-they-don't-know-any-better-than-to-be-idiot's', in other words his cousin Dudley. NOT that Dudley didn't deserve it, oh NO! He certainly DID! But Harry was just getting used to having parents around and he didn't want to disappoint them so soon. He would have plenty of time for that later when he was a teenager.

The bane of Harry's existence, Dudley, who was ever the opportunist, was again sitting atop his younger and smaller cousin, again eating Harry's lunch, although enjoying it quite a bit more than he had two

months ago. This time he was licking his lips over a thick juicy roast beef sandwich, a thermos of rich hearty soup, a shiny red apple, and fresh homemade biscuits, instead of a stale piece of bread with cheese of questionable quality, which had previously been his cousin's usual lunchtime fare. Yes! This was much better pickings! In Dudley's astute culinary estimation, having an aunt back from the dead who liked to cook was not such a bad thing at all, no matter what his parents said.

"Shuddupshrm!" Dudley mumbled. He had already downed the soup and was now trying to cram as much of the sandwich into his mouth in one bite as he could. "Illgerroff whenifeellikkit (cough... cough... cough...)"

WHACK!

"Hasn't anyone ever taught you that it isn't polite to talk with your mouth full of someone else's lunch?" a slightly hoarse yet quietly authoritative voice queried, as its owner roughly pulled the young blond boy to his feet while dislodging the bit of sandwich from his windpipe in one swift efficient movement.

"HEY! Whadda' do that for? Ruined a perfectly good sammich!" Dudley whined, not the least bit appreciative of the sudden influx of oxygen into his lungs, but instead seemed more dismayed at the loss of the food.

'I'm beginning to wonder that myself...' R.J. thought to himself as he critically surveyed the ungrateful young man. "Because, if I had let you choke to death I would have been found derelict in my duties as Playground Monitor," he returned dryly as the bell started ringing in the distance. '...and I need the job. Otherwise, I would have let you choke as you deserve to you little bully...' "Now I suggest you return to the classroom. Lunchtime is over. You too, boys... all of you, back to class," he said including the rest of the crowd of nine-year-olds that had been encircling the other two on the ground, cheering on Dudley.

"But... but I'm not done eating my lunch! I'll starve!" Dudley protested vehemently.

“You mean you are not done eating Harry’s lunch. I saw you finish your own ten minutes ago. I happen to know that they serve a very balanced meal in the school cafeteria that is geared towards preventing the starvation of the student body. Now march young man!” Mr. Wolfe ordered, with a tone that meant there was no room for argument, as he pointed towards the building. As the blonde boy stomped off in a huff towards the school building, he turned and made a rude gesture before he hurried to catch up to his friends. R.J. Wolfe just shook his head in disgust, and then turned to scrutinize his other charge, Dudley’s cousin Harry Krueger. Harry had rolled over and was now lying on his back on the tarmac with his eyes closed, glasses askew, and a new scrape across the end of his nose. Other than spitting out bits of gravel, he was making no sound.

“Are you okay?” R.J. asked with concern at how quiet the small boy was, wondering now if Dudley hadn’t done some true physical damage, other than the minor scrapes he could see.

“Yeah... I’m fine... thanks Mr. Wolfe.” The small boy said softly as he opened his brilliant green eyes and looked up with a pained expression into the eyes of his teacher.

‘Merlin! The color of those eyes takes me back...’ R.J. started to think with a start then shook the melancholy memory out of his head and concentrated on the boy instead. “Then why the distressed look?”

“I just told myself I wasn’t going to let Dudley get the best of me again, and he did it anyway.” Harry replied in frustration.

“Again? You mean he’s done this before?”

“All the time.” Harry sighed as he sat up and brushed himself off. R. J. readily sympathized with the boy as he could recognize the universal sound of the sigh-of-the-long-suffering-and-unfairly-persecuted-underdog from his own personal experience.

“Taking your lunch? Or sitting on you?” he asked, half way amused at the thought of having found this much in common with a young muggle.

“Both.” Harry answered and peered up curiously at the teacher. Except for Mrs. Krueger, his substitute teacher in December who turned out to be his long lost mum, no other teacher, or any adult for that matter, had ever seemed to care what Dudley did to him. And even though his mum and dad were now doing their best to make up for lost time in that regard, the sensation of someone, anyone, actually noticing or caring anything about him was still new and a bit uncomfortable.

“Well, we’ll see if we can’t put a stop to that. Sorry I didn’t see what was happening soon enough to rescue your soup and sandwich but at least the apple and biscuits are okay.” R.J. said picking up the discarded lunch sack and taking stock of its remaining contents before handing it over.

“That’s okay Mr. Wolfe. I’m really not used to eating lunch anyway, at least not much anyway. This is plenty.”

“What do you mean you aren’t used to eating lunch?”

“Dudley normally ate it. And when he didn’t, it wasn’t very... well Aunt Petunia really didn’t like to make me lunch...”

“Doesn’t Dudley eat the hot lunch from the cafeteria?”

“Yeah...”

“So why don’t you?”

“Well before... Uncle Vernon didn’t like to waste money on me, and I didn’t have any money of my own, so...” Harry shrugged as if he didn’t really see the inequity. “Besides it doesn’t matter now. MY mum likes to make me lunches now.” He finished smiling at the thought.

“That’s right... when I started I read all the files to acquaint myself with the students and I noticed that on all your records your last name had been erased and changed to ‘Krueger’. Wasn’t that the name of your substitute teacher just before the Christmas break?” and at the enthusiastic nod from the boy he added, “So you were recently adopted then?”

“Yeah!” Harry said brightening up considerably. “And now I have mum, and a dad, and a baby sister too! I have a whole entire family of my very own!”

“Wow. That is something.” R.J. chuckled at the boy’s unconcealed excitement. “Why don’t you eat your apple while we walk back to class? There’s no telling how long the classroom will remain in one piece if we aren’t there to guard it from your... er... exuberant cousin.” he said with a small smile as he held out his hand to help Harry to his feet. Harry couldn’t help but smile in return at the companionable way this new teacher said ‘we’ as if they were a team and there was some private joke between them.

“Thanks again.” Harry said with heartfelt appreciation.

“You’re quite welcome Harry.” R.J. said putting his hand on the boy’s shoulder as they walked towards the school. It was moments like this, connecting with a student that made his pitiful life worthwhile he thought wryly. For the past eight years, R.J. Wolfe had wandered the globe, living hand to mouth, and searching in vain for what he had lost, but not knowing where to even begin looking. And while he hadn’t known where to find it, he knew exactly what it was that he was missing. He was missing the closeness of another human being, someone that he cared about, who cared about him in return. He was missing his friends. He was missing having an entire family of his very own. He was missing his home. But no matter how long or how hard he searched, he couldn’t find it.

Finally, last Christmas he admitted defeat, returned to England, and started trying to forget. But this current post, as a substitute teacher at a muggle Primary school in Surrey England, instead of helping him forget had acutely reminded him for what he had been searching. Thinking about it more deeply, it wasn’t the teaching, the school, or even being back in England that reminded him, but rather ‘who’ he was teaching. More concisely, it was teaching one little boy in particular, the one walking by his side right now, that deeply reminded him of all that he was missing, all that he had lost. It was hard not to remember, when the boy looked so much like...

'Gods! What in Merlin's name is that Dursley demon up to now!?!' All reflections into his past life were discarded as abruptly as the half chewed sandwich on the playground, as he broke into a run down the hallway. For as they neared the classroom he could see smoke pouring out from under the door and could hear the fire alarm bellowing.

Pushing against the tide of small screaming bodies that started pouring out of his classroom door, covered with extinguisher foam, R. J. started to boil as he saw Dudley standing next to the fire alarm, with the school principal, holding a spent fire extinguisher and looking properly 'heroic' for the lack of a better word, although perhaps 'smug' would fit better.

"That right Principal Speer," Dudley said nodding his head to the Principal with a sly sideways glance to his approaching teacher, "Mr. Wolfe wasn't ANYWHERE to be seen so when I saw HARRY had lit his homework on FIRE I just couldn't sit back and let the ENTIRE SCHOOL burn to the ground, NOT after what happened to MY house..." he tacked on with the appropriate look of anguish on his face and an accusatory glance at his cousin, "...so I set off the alarm and put out the fire ALL BY MYSELF!"

"Very good Dudley! To think you had the presence of mind to act so bravely when you were so recently traumatized by a pyromaniac." Principal Speer praised Dudley with a meaningful glance at Harry. "I am very proud of you. That is the kind of initiative we like to see in our students. I will make sure you get a letter of commendation to take home to your parents. I know your parents personally from the Country Club, and I am sure they will want to amply reward you for your exemplary behavior." The principle beamed while he patted him on the head, and then turned to glower over his spectacles at his newest substitute teacher and his biggest problem student.

"Mr. Wolfe we will speak about this incident in my office. And you!" he said wagging a finger at Harry. "This is your last warning young man. First, you plague your teacher to the point she had a nervous breakdown before Christmas, and then when she recovers enough to come back in January, you assault her physically! And now! Attempting to burn down the school! I am coming to the opinion that

your uncle was right in advising me to transfer you to St. Brutus' Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys. I understand from him that your adoption is not final yet, so he still has some say in the matter of your disposition, and criminal behavior such as yours will certainly be taken into account when deciding if you truly deserve a family or not. One more incident and I ..."

Harry just bit his lip as tears welled up in his eyes but he denied nothing and instead just stared at his trainers, trying to shrink small enough to hide from his Principal's wrath, his old self-preservation habits still firmly ingrained. He was used to taking the blame, and being yelled at for anything Dudley did wrong. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he agreed that it was only fair to do so, because it probably was his fault for being a freak, just as they always said. But just because he was used to adults yelling at him for things he didn't do, didn't mean that he liked it.

All the while Dudley was puffing out his chest and gloating more and more at the chain of events he had caused. He would show this clueless substitute teacher what-was-what and who-was-who and to not mess with Dudley Dursley! And if he could remind his freaky little cousin of a thing or two along the way... well, HA! All the better!

"Wait just a minute Principal Speer, Harry is innocent of this charge. I can vouch for him myself." Mr. Wolfe interrupted.

"Oh he looks innocent enough I agree, but don't let that fool you. It has never stopped him from causing trouble before!" the man blustered.

"But he was nowhere near the classroom so he couldn't have possibly started the fire." Mr. Wolfe assured him, "In fact, he was walking in from the playground with me."

"He doesn't have to be somewhere for freaky things to happen, just take Mrs. Gryfford for instance."

"Leona Gryfford? The permanent teacher? Why? What about her?"

“He seems to have taken a particular dislike to her, and harassed her to the point she collapsed into a fair raving lunatic, that’s what about her! I don’t know at this point if she will ever return to teaching!”

“And just how did a nine-year-old supposedly wreak that much havoc?” R.J. was finding it hard to believe that the quiet boy could have driven anyone insane. His cousin Dudley maybe, but... Harry?

“That... hooligan... physically attacked her and broke her leg! And that was just the latest incident in a long string of delinquent behavior. I have a file on him full of all the freakish things he’s done!”

“Harry? Did you really do that?” Mr. Wolfe asked giving the nine-year old a very odd speculative look. ‘Freakish things? Accidental magic in muggle-born wizards is often mistaken to be acts of bad behavior. I wonder... could Harry be a wizard?’

Harry just kept his head down and shrugged defeated. “...I guess so.”

“See!” The Principal crowed. “He admits it!”

“Wait... did you ask him how many of this happened?”

“Of course not. Why bother! Everyone knows he’s a troublemaker. Why his uncle told me just last week that he was the cause of their house ...”

“I don’t know.” R.J. firmly interrupted the Principal’s building diatribe, “and I would like to hear it myself. Harry? Can you tell us how it happened?”

“Well, I was on the roof and Mrs. Gryfford she climbed up on some old boxes, so she could see over the edge of the roof to yell at me to come down I guess. And I guess one of them was rotted or something and it gave way and she fell. I didn’t want that to happen! Sure, she’s really strict, and she’s always shaking her head at me, but she’s never really yelled at me and I didn’t hate her! I didn’t want her to get hurt! If I had been on the ground like Dudley was I would have tried to catch her! Really! I would have! I wouldn’t have just stood there! I would have tried to save her!”

“Why were you on the roof to begin with?”

“Dudley and his gang was Harry Hun...” the words stuck in his throat at a very menacing look from his cousin who was glaring out from behind the Principal. “...ah... I mean some of the kids were playing... um... hide-and-seek... that’s right it was hide-and-seek and I was... er... hiding?” He ended it as more of a question than a statement of fact.

“So you were just playing a game?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But why did you climb up on the roof? Didn’t you know that wasn’t safe?”

“When I was running and looking for place to... uh... hide... I couldn’t find one anywhere and Dud... uh... the other kids were getting closer and I... I ... just kind of panicked... and I... I...” ‘I can’t tell Mr. Wolfe that I don’t know how I got up there! That it just happened! That it was magic! He’ll think I’m a freak too! And Dad said I had to be careful and not let the muggles know about my magic! He said we were all still hiding and that it wouldn’t be safe right now, and that we have to be careful and protect Mum and Holly. He said he there are Death Eaters looking for us, because of what happened to Aunt Petunia’s house... Mr. Wolfe’s teeth do look a little sharp... but doesn’t look like he would kill people and eat them... but still I better not...’

“Yes? Yes? You, what? What? WHAT!” Principal Speer finally spat out in exasperation, his patience all but evaporated along with the smoke.

“...I ...I ... I climbed up on some garbage cans and then onto the roof because... because I... I-wanted-to-win-the-game-and-I-wouldn’t-come-back-down-when-Mrs-Gryfford-told-me-to-so-she-tried-to-climb-up-after-me-and-make-me-and-that’s-when-she-fell.” Harry finished in one breath thinking quickly of another explanation of how he could have gotten onto the roof.

“So you didn’t actually break your teacher’s leg?” R.J. sounded vaguely disappointed at this revelation, earning a dark speculative look of his own from the Principal. But he couldn’t help it. For a moment there, he was actually excited he was teaching again. Imagine finding a young unknown muggle-born wizard! Someone he could really teach something meaningful to! But there was nothing about the explanation that sounded even remotely like accidental magic had been involved, now maybe if Harry had spontaneously materialized on the roof... now, that, that would have been something! But muggle or not, Harry was still his student, and from what he had observed, one that was continually being picked on by his cousin. His slips of the tongue during his tale had not gone unnoticed, and as someone who grew up picked on by others, R.J. felt a certain kinship and the need to defend him.

“...no...”

“Then why on earth did you say you did?”

“Because... because she wouldn’t have broken it if she hadn’t been climbing on the boxes, and she wouldn’t have been climbing on the boxes if I hadn’t been on the roof to start with... so it was kind of my fault...”

“So you felt responsible?”

“... yeah...”

“It sounds as if was just an unfortunate accident, caused by Mrs. Gryfford’s own lack of judgment. She was an adult and should have known better than to climb on stacked boxes. She should have gotten a sturdy ladder if she wanted to climb to the roof. It seems to me Principal Speer, that Mrs. Gryfford’s unfortunate accident was not the fault of the young man before you. And if all you have is similar circumstantial evidence, regarding the other incidents you mentioned, then I would strongly recommend that you remove any trace of them from that file you talked about... before his parents bring a lawsuit against you for libel and slander.”

At the Principal's narrowing of the eyes, and apparent hesitancy to agree, he added, "And, I believe you owe Harry an apology." Mr. Wolfe said calmly but deliberately staring the man in the eyes.

Principal Speer flinched back a bit at the look in R.J. Wolfe's eyes. While his teacher's demeanor was normally quiet and unassuming, he occasionally got a glimpse of something very dark and feral when he looked him in the eyes. It was very disquieting so he tried to do that as little as possible. If he could have, he would have made other arrangements to cover the class. But no other substitute teacher was available on such short notice. It had been beginning to look like he would have to teach the class himself, when a fully qualified teacher walked in the front door of the school, out of the blue, asking if there were any openings. At first, he thought it was a godsend to find someone so unexpectedly, almost as if Father Christmas had brought him a late Christmas gift in the guise of a made-to-order teacher, but now he wasn't so sure.

"Ah... sorry... ah..." He started to sputter.

"...Harry..." R.J. prompted.

"Right... sorry Harry." He said distastefully, "Now Mr. Wolfe, I suggest you get your classroom pulled together and your students in their seats instead of running amok in the hallways."

"I thought you wanted to talk about this further in your office." R.J. said with just a hint of humor, knowing full well that the Principal just wanted to get away as quickly as he could from the unpleasant scene.

"No... no... that's quite alright. Just carry on. Carry on. Oh, and get a haircut!" Principal Speer said over his shoulder as he walked quickly away down the hall towards the relative safety of his office, mumbling complaints about how R.J.'s hair had been much shorter when he hired him and he wouldn't have hired him to begin with if he had known he was going to let it grow so long so fast.

"Well, that's that then." R.J. said halfway to himself before looking down to see Harry grinning back at him and he had to do a double

take. 'Merlin! I would almost swear that... but it couldn't possibly be...'

"What do we do now Mr. Wolfe?" Harry asked tugging on his sleeve.

"Oh right! We round up the class I guess." R.J. said getting down to business. "Dudley! Get over here!"

"Whadda want?" he asked in a surly voice.

"That's: 'what do you want Sir' or 'what do you want Mr. Wolfe'," R.J. corrected him, "and what I want is for you to let the class know that it is safe to return. In the meantime Harry and I will clean up a bit."

"Why me?" Dudley pouted at the thought of extending any effort to help.

"You ran them out. You can run them back in. You have five minutes young man. Now march!" R.J. said pointing him to the playground. He watched as Dudley took his time, sauntering slowly in protest, before turning back to Harry. "Now let's see, why don't you go down to the office and see if they have any more supplies they can spare us. I think that after all the excitement this afternoon it might be a good day to continue our Arts and Crafts project. It may be the one subject that will capture the classes' attention again. Only our supplies seem to be quite... damp." He observed wryly, picking up a sheet of wet construction paper between his thumb and forefinger as it dripped bright florescent pink polka-dots on the floor. "... and while you do that, I'll mop up."

"Yes Sir, Mr. Wolfe, Sir!" Harry grinned and shouted over his shoulder as he took off on a run down the hallway. R.J. chuckled at the difference between the two cousins. It was like night and day. Harry was already out of sight, while Dudley was still meandering as slowly as he could possibly go. R.J. felt he would be lucky if Dudley returned in five minutes, let alone with the rest of the class in tow. Sighing he turned back to the shambles of the classroom and shut the door behind him.

After what had happened eight years ago, R.J. had vowed to leave the wizarding world behind and to never return, but as a blob of foam dripped from a light fixture and found its target atop R.J.'s head he decided a little magic now and then, didn't hurt. And right now, it was the only thing he could think of to deal with the monumental mess that Dudley had made before the class returned.

He drew out his wand, and fingered it thoughtfully, even though he hadn't used it in years he always kept it close by out of habit. He couldn't imagine not having it on him, even if he wasn't using it, any more than he could imagine simply not breathing. It was as much a part of him as his lungs. Waving it around the room, he cast a 'Scourgify' cleaning charm and within a blink of an eye the ruined supplies were in the dust bin, and everything else was dry, devoid of foam, and once again in spic and span order. Studying the results of the slim piece of wood, he sighed tiredly and reluctantly stuffed it back in his pocket just as the door opened and his students tumbled into class. 'Tumble' being the correct word, as after the excitement of the fire drill, they were all going a mile a minute. Arts and Crafts! That was the last thing he needed when he wasn't feeling his best, a class of twenty-two hyper children armed with scissors and glue. Whatever was he thinking!

R.J. ran his hand through his grey flecked light brown hair, took a deep breath and plastered a smile on his tired face. It was Friday and he felt absolutely terrible. He just wanted to get through the rest of this day and go home, lock himself in his flat, and crawl into bed and not come out until Monday morning. It had been a long week and he was not a well man. He normally liked to hole up for several days before, during, and after, he had a relapse of his 'recurring illness'. He was cutting it close this time but he really hadn't been given a choice. He'd talked with the Principal earlier in the week and told him that he thought he was coming down with the flu, and had tried to beg a few days off. Even though he was obviously ill and not faking it, Principal Speer had replied that while he was only too glad to let him have the time off, if he took it, he was not welcome to come back. R.J. had been broke and out of work before, and knew he'd get by again somehow, but he had felt so lucky to have found work for a little while, even if it was only temporary, that he didn't want to give it up so soon. Enough money to rent a cheap flat and buy a few decent meals was

all that he was asking. Living on ketchup soup and saltines got real old, real quick.

“Class! Class! Attention please!” R.J. called out over the din, “If everyone would be quiet and look at me, we’ll get started on our arts and craft project. OR if you would prefer...,” he added loudly as the decibel level didn’t diminish a whit, “...we can all just take turns reading aloud from our history books instead.” That did it! R.J. thought satisfied as forty four eyeballs immediately glued themselves to him and twenty two mouths shut tight. Arts and Crafts versus history? NO competition!

Since the next Wednesday would be Saint Valentine’s Day, they had been industriously working on making a special Valentine for someone in their family. R.J. knew that the normal valentine exchanges the rest of the primary classes were having were a risky business. There were sure to be some hurt feelings, as a few children were snubbed while others were puffed up by their ‘popularity’ for having received the most valentines. He also knew that given the option, most of the children would simply buy them, and those that could not afford to do likewise would feel singled out for ridicule because of their homemade ones. R.J. knew first hand, how cruel children could be to each other without even meaning to be, and he had done his best to prevent situations where it could happen whenever he could. So, even though the majority of the class wanted to do an exchange, he had vetoed the idea, in favor of having them make just a one very special valentine for someone special in their lives, instead of a lot of ones that didn’t mean as much. Leave it to Dudley though, to try and spoil even that.

Dudley? You have a question?” R.J. groaned inwardly. He should have known the class troublemaker would have an objection again, as he had every other time they had started working on the valentines.

“Yeah. I still don’t understand why we have to make some dumb old card. My mum gave me enough money to buy her a ‘real’ card at the store! Not a stupid handmade one.”

“Don’t you think she would appreciate one that she didn’t have to buy herself with her own money? One that you put a little thought into,

just for her?" R.J. replied so firmly it made the questions more of a statement of fact.

Dudley didn't answer. He just slumped down in his desk and glowered. He did NOT want to make a card! It was too hard! Mr. Wolfe had kept encouraging them to 'be creative'. Didn't Mr. Wolfe know that 'creative' was a lot of work! He thought he would get out of it by setting off the fire alarm and drenching the classroom. Then he had brilliantly tried to blame it on his freaky little cousin. But it hadn't worked. He didn't know how he had done it, but not only had Mr. Wolfe gotten the Principal to apologize to the freak, by the time he brought the class back in, Mr. Wolfe had also succeeded in drying out the room and putting it to rights again. Dudley scowled at his teacher and sulked. Mr. Wolfe was as freaky as his cousin Harry was. He didn't like it when his plans didn't work out.

R.J. decided to just ignore Dudley's pout, something else that Dudley didn't appreciate, as he was used to being pampered and getting his own way. Instead, R.J. concentrated on the rest of the class. Since Harry had come back empty handed from the office, R.J. was thankful that he had stored their works-in-process in the crafts cupboard so that they had not been damaged by the deluge with the rest of the supplies. He was really quite proud of the class, as most of the children had put some real effort into their valentines, and it would have been a shame if all that effort had gone to waste.

All of the children without exception, had chosen to make a card for their mother, and without a doubt, of all the children Harry seemed to be the most excited about the valentine project. Remembering now how he lit up earlier, when he said he finally had an entire family of his very own, R.J. now understood what the valentine really meant to the small boy. This would probably be the first gift he had to give his new mum. No wonder he had worked especially hard on it. Most of the children, (excluding Dudley since R.J. had made the rule that nothing they brought to use could be store bought), had brought additional odds and ends of found objects from home to help beautify their cards and there were some quite spectacular ones. These weren't just a simple heart cut out of paper with 'Be Mine' written on it, and it called good. No the cards they were working on were literal

works of art. It never ceased to amaze him how creative children could be when given the opportunity.

“Class, since the rest of our the supplies were ruined, and the office didn’t have any more to spare, why don’t we talk about what Saint Valentine’s day is about. It is always good to know just what you are celebrating. Do any of you know the origin of the day?” At a raised hand R. J. said, “Yes, Piers?”

“My dad says it was started by women as another way to make men feel guilty so they have to buy them expensive jewelry.”

“Well Piers, presents are certainly a part of the modern version of the day, but it actually started as something quite different. During the Roman Empire...” at the loud groaning from the class and murmured objections of ‘No fair! We were quiet so we wouldn’t have to read history!’ he added “...life isn’t always fair, and that is exactly the point I was about to make. Trying to right a wrong is how many customs and traditions start. And that is how Saint Valentine’s Day started too. During the early days of Rome there were fierce wolves living in the woods surrounding the city, and many a young girl gathering wood in the forest was killed.” R.J. let out a howl to illustrate his story and at the echoing bays from the boys in the class, he immediately regretted his rash impulse to be entertaining, especially when the topic made its logical jump in the mind of every nine-year-old boy in the room to MONSTERS!

“Were they WEREWOLVES?” a boy named Gordon asked with awe, his eyes getting big and round and his jaw dropping open as he stared at his teacher with his sharp sharp teeth and long shaggy hair.

“No they were just timber wolves, but they were very dangerous.” R.J. answered trying to derail the subject before it got too far down the tracks to be stopped.

“Werewolves are scary! They rip your throat out and tear you into little pieces!” Piers jumped in and added to the conversation.

“I wouldn’t be scared!” Dudley boasted. “If I saw a werewolf I would kill it dead! I’d just shoot it with the BB gun I got for Christmas. ”

"That wouldn't do any good Dud! You have to put a wooden stake through their hearts." Gordon countered playacting by grasping his chest and falling out of his chair and to the floor as if he had been stabbed.

"I heard you can keep them away with crosses and garlic." Malcolm nodded knowingly, ignoring his pal's theatrics.

"That's vampires you stupid idiots! You kill werewolves with silver bullets." Piers scoffed as the boys started throwing out remedies for all sort of monsters and things that go bump in the night. This train of thought was going downhill fast. And on a topic, which R.J. really did not want to discuss with a classroom of muggle nine-year-olds.

"Boys! Boys! Let's get back to Valentines, why don't we?" R.J. said much to the relief of the little girls who were starting to look anxious at the talk of monsters. "And Piers, there will be no name calling in my class. Please apologize."

"Sorry guys." Piers said sheepishly as he helped pull Gordon to his feet. "But Mr. Wolfe, can normal people really become monsters like werewolves?"

"People are just people, no matter what ailments they might or might not have. Don't judge anyone until you get to know him or her for who he or she really is on the inside. There is some good and some bad in everyone. Just remember that everyone deserves some respect." R.J. knew he wasn't answering the question, heck he knew he wasn't even doing a good job at covering up the fact that he wasn't answering it, but he hoped that it would at least satisfy them until he could come up with something better. Nine-year-olds may not be all that well-informed, but they are very curious and keenly observant at all the wrong times. Though he had left the magical world behind, he still felt bound to keep its secrets, and telling a class of muggle children that yes werewolves, vampires, trolls, and dragons, were all very real, was not the way. But all his speech got was a dark look of disbelief from Dudley, and an oddly thoughtful one from Harry.

“And Dudley, I would advise you not to go shooting anything without supervision. I’m sure your father will show you the proper way to use your gun, and then only in a secure firing range.” ‘At least I hope he will.’ He added under his breath.

“Now back to Saint Valentine’s Day. To keep the wolves away from their young women, the Romans asked one of their gods, Lupercus, to protect them. To honor Lupercus and thank him for his protection they would hold a great feast on February fifteenth called the festival of Lupercalia. As part of the festival, all the young men would draw the name of one of the young women to be his sweetheart for the year.” At the rolling of eyes from all the little boys, and the corresponding batting of eyes from all the little girls, he chuckled and added. “You might think of it as a kind of an ancient form of computer matchmaking or speed-dating.”

“About this same time, there was also a very power hungry Emperor who decided that he wanted to build a great army. Emperor Claudius thought that if the young men fell in love and married they would want to stay home and not fight his wars, so he made a decree that no young man could marry. But just making a decree did not mean that the young men didn’t still fall in love. They did anyway. To communicate with their sweethearts, they would exchange secret notes of love and affection. These notes were the only contact many of the couples had until a very good man, a priest by the name of Valentine, who thought that it was wrong to deny young love, decided to help them. Valentine defied the Emperor and performed the marriage ceremonies anyway. When the Emperor found out what Valentine was doing, he executed him on the eve of the festival, to make an example of him to others who would do the same. Later when Valentine was named a saint, the festival was moved from the fifteenth of February to the fourteenth in honor of his death, and renamed Saint Valentine’s Day. And so instead of a festival to keep the wolves away from the gate, it became known as a day of true love.”

“Today the tradition of exchanging notes of love and affection, in the form of valentines, is still the main part of the holiday. So, in the tradition of the festival of Lupercalia and Saint Valentine, now that we have all made a valentine we each need to add a special message to

it, to tell the person we are giving it to what they truly mean to us.” R.J. noted a few questioning looks at this statement. “Yes, Malcolm?”

“But I made my valentine for my mum! I can’t write her a mushy love note! I mean... ICK!” Malcolm looked positively anguished at the thought, he loved his mum and all, but he wouldn’t even let her hug him in public! If he gave her a mushy note... well, there would be no end to it! She would embarrass him in front of all his friends! He just knew it!

“There is no need for it to be mushy,” R.J. said trying not to laugh at the mortified looks that the boys were giving him. “And I think everyone did one for their mum so you’re not alone.”

“Not Harry!” Dudley piped up. “He don’t really got a mum!”

“But didn’t you say you were recently...” R.J. started to address Harry a bit puzzled, but stopped as he noticed the flush rising on his pale face and the troubled look in his eyes.

“Nah!” Dudley cut in. “My dad says him and mum gave him away because he was causing too much trouble. He don’t really got a dad and mum yet. It’s not legal. And mum says that now the Krueger’s have him that they’re sorry they ever took him.” Dudley finished as the class started to giggle at Harry’s humiliation.

“Dudley! I’m sure that’s not true. Now let’s get back to...” R.J. said sternly trying to stop the conversation.

“Yes it is!” Dudley ruthlessly cut back in. “My dad says as soon as the Kruegers find out he’s a freak they’ll dump him back on us again.” He finished smirking evilly as tittering broke out among the rest of the class.

“Dudley! Class! Enough of that.” R. J. admonished them and gave them all a very harsh look, firmly squelching the sniggering. “I am sure that Harry’s new parents want him very much. And none of your personal lives, Harry’s included, are a proper topic of discussion for this class. However, if any of you ever do need to talk about something, I am always willing to listen, in private. And Dudley...” he

turned his stern look on the blonde boy. "...what did I say about name calling?"

"...mmnomphnamemrcallininclass..." Dudley mumbled under his breath.

"What? I can't hear you. Speak up." R.J. commanded.

"No name callin' in class."

"So...?"

"So what?" Dudley frowned.

"So apologize to Harry."

"Fer what? I didn't call him no name!"

"Dudley! Either apologize now or report to the principal's office."

"...s'rry..." Dudley said halfheartedly in Harry's direction but directed it more to the wall instead. R.J. wasn't totally satisfied Dudley had learned a lesson, but felt it was the best he was going to get under the circumstances, and prolonging the conversation would just cause Harry more embarrassment, and he didn't want to do that to his little friend. Best to move on. Quickly.

"Before we were interrupted, I was explaining to Malcolm that the valentine notes just need to be something that tells the person you are giving it to that you appreciate him or her. Something simple is fine. I anticipated that some of you might have a little trouble expressing yourselves, so I thought that we should talk about different ways we could write our valentines. Then you can think about it over the weekend and next week we will finish them up. Don't worry. I'm here to assist anyone who needs help with the wording. How does that sound?" he asked hopefully, and was encouraged by the slightly less panicked faces looking back at him. Only one face was glaring daggers at the prospect, that of Dudley Dursley.

R.J. spent the rest of the afternoon introducing the class to different ways of expressing their feelings in a heartfelt message, from the very basic note of just a few words, to the more elaborate poem with rhymes and meter, and even the Japanese haiku form. By the end, he was gratified that most of them were excited again and were trying to rhyme words, and looking up really big fancy impressive words to use in the classroom thesaurus.

Dudley stayed in his seat and pouted. He still did NOT want to make a card! And now Mr. Wolfe not only wanted them to make a card, he wanted them to write a poem on it too! He racked his brain and tried and tried to come up with something clever to write on his card but just came up with a big fat nothing. Dudley didn't like it when he didn't feel smart. And this was making him feel VERY stupid. He was just going to have to come up with another way, one that didn't involve any work or creativity on his part.

When the bell finally rang, all of R.J.'s energy was spent. But he had made it through the day and, despite his instincts to the contrary, he hadn't killed anyone yet, not even Dudley. Though Dudley had pushed all his buttons and he had come very, very close to losing control. Dismissing the class, he called out one last reminder that if they hadn't finished assembling their cards yet, to bring more supplies on their own the next week. Studying the children out the window as they were being picked up by their parents, he wondered again about Harry and Dudley and how two cousins could be so different especially when, from what he understood from the other teachers, Dudley's mother had raised them both until just recently.

As the crowd of children thinned out, he was concerned when he saw that Harry hadn't been picked up as the other children were, and that he was walking home by himself. He was half way down the block already. Children these days should not walk alone, even down familiar streets, too many bad things could happen. He had just about decided to walk him home himself, to make sure he got there safely, when he saw Dudley and his friends, who were just leaving the grounds, spot Harry ahead of them, and take off in a run to catch up. Relieved that Dudley wasn't letting Harry walk home alone, R.J. turned back to his desk to pack up his satchel. Maybe they got along better than he thought. He shrugged as he turned out the lights. Well,

he shouldn't be too surprised, he mused. Sometimes opposite personalities could make the best of friends.

Harry, for his part, wasn't so glad that Dudley was running after him. He knew it wasn't because his cousin wanted to be jolly mates all of a sudden, but because his cousin wanted to beat him up again. He and his gang were 'Harry Hunting' as they were the time he ended up on the school roof. Hearing the pounding feet coming up fast behind him, he didn't even have to look back to know who it was. Being smaller sometimes had its advantages, and to escape the posse, Harry took advantage of every one of them. Being lighter than Dudley was, he was also swifter on his feet, and could run like the wind. Being thinner, he could squish in between the slats of the fence and take shortcuts, barred to his more beefy pursuers. He arrived home, several steps ahead of Dudley and his gang. Dashing up the stairs he pulled out the door key, strung on a string around his neck as he went, and locked the door behind him once he was safe inside. Dropping his book bag, he leaned back against the door and took a deep breath. As Dudley slammed into the closed door, he could feel the whole wall shudder behind him. A muffled 'Just wait till next time!' could be heard along with the sound of Dudley stomping down the stairs to the flat below. Harry was out of breath, but other than a couple of more scratches, he was still more or less in one piece.

"Hi sweetie! Did you have a nice day?" Lily looked up smiling at him from the couch where she was feeding the ever hungry baby Holly. "Why don't you come over and sit by me and tell me all about it?"

Harry smiled back and went shyly over to sit next to her and the baby. He was so happy, and so nervous, that it made his stomach hurt. His mum actually seemed pleased to see him every time he came home. It was such a change from Aunt Petunia who would just sniff at him when he used to come home, as if he had stepped in something bad and hadn't seen fit to scrape it back off. He really liked these warm greetings, but kept wondering when it would change. How long would it take for his parents to remember that he was just a freak and decide to leave again as they did before? Every day that he woke up and didn't find himself in his cupboard, he prayed that today wouldn't be that day. But at the same time, he wished that if it were going to

happen it would just happen, and get over. He felt like he was on a teeter-totter and he couldn't get off.

Lily put an arm around him and tried to pull him in close. When he seemed a bit reluctant, she bit her lip and reminded herself that the adoption counselor had said there would be an adjustment period, and to be patient. But it was so hard! All this waiting. And truthfully, she really wasn't any better at being patient than James. Besides, it wasn't as if Harry wasn't their child, he was their own son, their own flesh and blood! When he was a baby, he was always so cuddly and never wanted her to put him down, just as Holly was now. She had her son back in body, now she wanted him back in spirit too. She wanted his heart.

"What's wrong honey?" she asked softly.

"Er... nothing really, I just thought I might be... um... smelly or... something..." he stammered out awkwardly. He really did want to cuddle he just wasn't sure it how to do it, or if it would be welcome. Aunt Petunia never allowed him to cuddle with her. She kept all her hugs exclusively for Dudley. Maybe his mum wanted to keep all of hers for Holly. Maybe there was a limit to a mother's love, there certainly had seemed to be with Aunt Petunia, one loving mum to one beloved child, no room for more. He had always felt like the odd one out, even now.

He used to dream that if he had parents of his own that they would live far away from Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon and Dudley. Somewhere, such as on little island in middle of the sea, or in a cabin on the top of a mountain, or maybe in the little rose covered cottage of his dreams, the one with the white picket fence around it and the tire swing in the tree. But the only thing that changed was that now he lived with them in a little first floor walk-up flat, with his Aunt and Uncle and Dudley living directly below in the ground floor apartment. He still even had to go to school with Dudley!

At times, when he couldn't sleep, he would wonder if his parents had had his aunt and uncle move in below because that way, if they decided to leave again, they wouldn't have far to go to get rid of him. Then he would get a big knot in his stomach, and he would get up

from the couch he slept on in the living room, and tiptoe into their bedroom, just far enough to make sure they were still there and that Holly was still in her crib, and curl up in the wooden rocking chair in the corner. Then he would watch them sleep until the knot went away. Now the knot was back, and it wasn't even night. It started twisting and turning in him when the Principal was yelling at him, telling him the adoption wasn't final, and just kept getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until he thought he was going to be sick.

"I think you smell just fine." Lily said pulling him close after all and patting his head down to her shoulder. She sniffed his hair deeply and made a small contented sound. "You smell like sunshine, apples, and mischief. Just what a little boy should smell like. So what did you learn today? Anything interesting?"

"Er..." Harry thought quickly. He couldn't tell her about the valentine he was making! That was for a surprise. He had made the grandest, most beautiful valentine he could think of. He had spent hours scouring the neighborhood looking for shiny fabric to sew on it, and bits of ribbon and lace for its edges. He had even spent hours practicing the embroidery stitches that Mrs. Figg had once taught him until they were smooth and even. It was almost complete, almost worthy of his mum. All he needed was a really good poem. Just thinking about it made him feel better, he just knew if he made the most perfect Valentine that his parents would keep him, and as he thought of it, the knot lessened a little. But what else could he tell her? The knot grew bigger again as he thought about the rest of the day. He certainly didn't want to tell her about the fire and getting into trouble with the principal! She might decide he was bad and too much bother. What else was there? Finally, he said hesitantly, "...we talked about werewolves..."

"Werewolves? Really?" 'Well that's unexpected... but at least he's talking and hasn't moved away yet.'

"Yeah, I don't think the teacher really wanted to talk about it though, because he changed the subject really fast when Dudley started to talk about shooting them with his new BB gun."

“Well I should hope so! Vernon never should have given it to him to begin with. Reckless and irresponsible if you ask me. A nine-year-old with a gun! It’s just soooo wrong in soooo many ways I can’t even begin to count them.”

“...er... M-mu-... er... Ma’am?”

‘He almost said it! He almost called me ‘Mum’. Almost! It was so close that time. How I would love to hear him say it just once!’ Lily’s heart skipped a beat. “Yes sweetie?”

“Are werewolves real?”

Lily took a deep breath. “I would like to say no sweetie, because I don’t want you to worry about things like that, but I won’t lie to you. Yes, there really are werewolves. But it isn’t as you may have seen in the horror movies or read about in comic books. Werewolves are just people who are ill.”

“...ill?”

“Yes, they have something called Lycanthropy. “

“What’s that? Is it catching?”

“It’s a magical disease that forces the person to transform each full moon into a very large wolf. And no, it isn’t catching, well not in the normal sense like a cold or the flu. But a werewolf can infect someone who doesn’t have the disease, if they bite them while in their transformed state. Fortunately, this happens only rarely, because most werewolves are responsible and take every precaution to ensure others are safe during this time. Mostly they are just people who are dealing with a devastating illness the best they can, and just want to be left alone. There are only a few werewolves that are truly dangerous and go out purposely and attack as many people as they can.”

“On purpose! Why would they do that?”

"I always thought it was because they were angry that they themselves were infected. So they want as many people as possible to join them in their suffering, as if somehow that will make their own suffering less of a burden. But I really don't know. The only werewolf I know is very kind, and he would never hurt another human being on purpose, I've never known a vengeful one on a personal level to ask."

"Don't know who to ask what?" James asked as the door opened and he stepped in. He threw his coat across the back of nearby chair, went over and gave his wife a kiss, and then settled down on the couch on the other side of his son, and passing out the bags of fish and chips that he had brought home for supper. They ate their meals on the couch now, as the small drop leaf kitchen table had been moved into the bedroom next to Holly's crib and converted into a changing table, and the dresser moved out into the combined kitchen-living room into the table's former place.

Everything was tight quarters in the tiny three-room flat with four people living in it. But until they could safely go back to the Wizarding world, the flat in the shabby building was all they could afford. And it did have its advantages. It was within easy walking distance of the Primary school, and there were only three flats so there were not a lot of neighbors to worry about. They rented the three-room flat on the first floor that was really just a converted attic space, their recently made-homeless-by-a-Death-Eater-raid in-laws the Dursleys had appropriated the larger two bedroom two bath flat on the ground floor, and then there was the mysterious neighbor who rented out the basement studio. He left early, came back late, and with his private entrance off the back alley, they hadn't even caught a glimpse of him. The only reason they even knew it was rented out, was because Vernon complained constantly about how noisy he was.

Nibbling on the still warm chips, Lily gave James a meaningful look over Harry's head and answered between bites, "I don't personally know a vengeful werewolf to ask why he would intentionally infect others."

"You mean like what Fenrir Greyback did to Moony?"

“Yes. Apparently, werewolves were the topic of discussion today in Harry’s class, and he had a few questions.”

“Kind of an odd topic for muggle Primary School.” James said with a frown ruffling his son’s hair thoughtfully and studying the lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead. “Maybe I ought to go have a talk with that teacher of yours for frightening you like that. Hey Lily, maybe we ought to put that dittany salve on his scar twice a day... it doesn’t seem to be fading like we thought it would.”

“Oh it’s all right... D-d.. er... Sir, you don’t need to talk to him. And I... I kind of like the scar.” ‘No no no no no! You can’t go talk with Mr. Wolfe! You might find out how bad I was today!’

‘Gods! How I would love to hear him call me ‘Dad’. Just one simple little word. Just three letters, a ‘d’ and an ‘a’... and another ‘d’. Just one tiny little syllable. That’s all I’m asking. Heck! He could just say ‘Da’ as he did when he was a baby and I’d be happy. But I can’t force it on him. I know I have to work on gaining that privilege back. After all, to Harry it must have seemed as if Lily and I just up and abandoned him for eight long years, something like that can’t just be forgotten, or forgiven, that easily, no matter what the reason for it.’

“Are you sure Son?” James replied emphasizing the last word. ‘Well... it couldn’t hurt. I’m going to call him that every chance I get! Son, Son, Son, Son, Son. Maybe he’ll get the idea I’m Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad.’

“I’m sure! I wasn’t scared at all, except... maybe a little when Dudley saying he would shoot one with his gun, because he’d really do it! I was just wondering because Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia always said monsters like that were make-believe, just like they always said that there wasn’t such a thing as magic, and the teacher didn’t say that.”

“No Son?”

“No. Piers asked him if there really were werewolves and he just said that people are people, and not to judge anyone unless you really know them. And then he said that there is some good and some bad

in everyone, and that everyone deserves some respect.” Harry quoted slowly, making sure he got it right. “But he never did say that werewolves weren’t real.”

“Maybe not Son. But you know Son... I think I liked his answer anyway. This teacher of yours Son must have more smarts than I first thought. So Son... what did you mother say?” James asked giving a look to Lily that said ‘whatever you said, I’ll back you up.’

“She said that they were real, and that they were just people who are so ill that they have to lie in bed can’t throw pies anymore.”

“Um... they can’t throw pies?” James frowned and threw Lily a puzzled look for an explanation that was just returned by an equally puzzled shrug.

“Yeah. And she said that it isn’t catching unless they bite you intentionally when they are... er... trans... transformed because of their disease.” He added looking at his mum to make sure he had the word right and was gratified at her nod.

“Oh I get it!” James started to laugh suddenly. “Lycanthropy! ‘ly-can-thro-py’ Can’t-throw-a-pie! I like it! Come to think of it, Moony never was partial to pie! And he threw like a girl! Maybe that’s why!”

“James! Don’t laugh!” Lily chastised him, trying to hide her own smile, as he held his sides that were hurting from laughing so hard.

“Who’s Moony?” Harry asked when James’s laughter finally subsided. He didn’t know why, but he was fairly sure that his dad and mum weren’t laughing at him but at this Moony person.

“Ah! Moony! Well Son, he is one of my two best friends.” James answered with a faraway look in his eyes. “And he is your Honorary Godfather.”

“Really? I have a Godfather?”

“Yup Son, you do. Actually, you have two. Padfoot is your Godfather and Moony is your Honorary Godfather.” James said sitting back and throwing an arm around him from the other side to match Lily’s, and making him once again into a Harry sandwich, an activity that his mum and dad seemed to be very partial of doing. “They are both great guys.” He added with affection.

“Am I going to meet them?”

“I don’t know Son. I’m not sure what happened to Padfoot, but I am afraid he might have been killed by the evil wizard. After he left your mum and me at the Sanatorium in Germany, he never came back. I haven’t seen him for a very long time.” James said sadly.

“Oh.” Harry said in a small voice. He did NOT like that evil wizard! His dad said that he was the reason that he and his mum had been gone for so long. “...maybe Padfoot is just... sleeping... too? And that’s why he left you all alone for so long? Like you and -“ he started to ask with a shy glance up at Lily first for confirmation that it really was okay to call her ‘Mum’, only to catch a fleeting glimpse of an unfamiliar look in her eyes that he didn’t understand, so in his anxiety, he mistook it for a ‘no’. His heart beat faster in disappointment and he swallowed the words. Dudley was right. They really didn’t want him forever, and he had been beginning to hope they might. “...like... like you and her both were?” the awkward words stumbled out.

“I hope so Son, I hope so. I hope he is just sleeping somewhere.” James said with a slight edge of frustration to his voice as he saw his wife’s hopeful face fall at his son’s choice of words.

“What about Moony. Did the evil wizard do bad things to him too?”

“I don’t know that either son. I wish I did. Moony is one of the best, a prince of a guy. In fact you might call him ‘The Enchanted Prince’.”

“I thought you were the Enchanted Prince.”

“No, I’m Prince Charming and your mother is the Princess Sleeping Beauty. No Moony is definitely the Enchanted Prince. I wonder what happened to him and to Padfoot and where they are right now...”

James said thoughtfully as the room took on a rosy glow. Soon the darkening sky would exchange the light of the setting sun with that of the bewitching pale luminescence of the rising full moon, and somewhere, if the evil wizard hadn't killed him, Moony would be transforming.

The little family fell silent, cuddled together on the comfy couch, each deep in their own thoughts. Holly wondering if now would be a good time to start crying again as no one seemed to be paying attention to her. James was wondering what was happening in the wizarding world and how it would impact his family, especially his children. The thought of what could be out there waiting for them, made him hug Harry even tighter. Lily wondering if the words 'Mum' and 'Dad' would ever come as naturally to Harry as the words 'Ma'am' and 'Sir' did. She hugged Harry tighter too, in the hopes of strengthening their fragile bond. Harry wondering if the value of being able to breathe again was worth more to him than the value of staying snug and warm in his cuddly spot squished between his parents. Parents won.

Two floors below, R.J. Wolfe slipped in the private back entrance to the basement studio flat and barred the door behind him. After securing the additional padlocks and deadbolts he had picked up at the hardware store after school, he affixed a heavy board over the one tiny ceiling height window with thick long cement screws. He felt better now he was securely locked in until Monday morning, but each small noise he made during his preparations, was protested loudly by the tenants above, who voiced their displeasure by pounding on their floor, which made an even louder echo pound through his one room flat with its cement walls and floor. But it was the cement walls, and the private entrance that had led him to rent this particular flat. The thick walls, and boarded window, should serve as fairly adequate soundproofing. So with the exception of the apartment directly above, no one should hear his howls and cries of pain as he transformed.

"There. That should do it. And just in time." He told himself as he downed a dose of Wolfsbane potion with a shudder of revulsion. "Merlin! No matter how many times I have taken this, I will never get used to the taste." After chasing the dose down with a liberal shot of firewhiskey, he put the empty potion vial back in his trunk and noted

with a sigh that his supply was rapidly dwindling. This was the final reason that spurred his return to England.

Wolfsbane potion was notoriously difficult to brew, and there was only one man he truly trusted to do it. Severus Snape. He had tried to supplement his supply on his travels with doses he had picked up from shady alchemists on the black market, but not only were they more costly, they were also less effective. He had had several close calls while relying on them, too close. So when he saw that his supply was almost gone this time, he gave up his search and returned. Now he just had to work up the nerve to go begging to Severus. The sooner the better he thought reluctantly, closing the trunk, he only had enough left for two or three more cycles, and it wasn't as if it only took a day or two to brew. No, it took a full cycle of the moon.

'Gods how I hate the moon,' he thought as he took another drink. Ever since he was a little boy, it had ruled his life. No matter how far he traveled, or where he went, he couldn't get away from the moon. It followed him everywhere. The only time it hadn't seemed like such a chain around his neck was when he finally had made friends at Hogwarts. At first, he was terrified that his classmates would find out and ostracize him as everyone else had his whole life, including his own family. His parents were relieved when he got his Hogwarts letter as it meant an end to their forced duty to him. When they put him on the train that first time, he knew it was a parting of the ways. They didn't want him back. No one had wanted him. He had never had a real family, a real home, not until the Marauders, James, Sirius and Peter. When they found out about his Lycanthropy, instead of being horrified they were intrigued, instead of ostracizing him they included him, instead of outing him to the entire school they kept his secret. It was the only time in his life he was truly happy.

'R.J. Wolfe'. Who was he trying to kid? Himself maybe. Without the rest of the Marauders, he just wasn't all that good at intrigue. 'R.J.' – hrumph! He couldn't even come up with a better pseudonym than just his initials. Maybe he should have used something more classic... like say 'Romulus'. That would have been funny, and fitting. Romulus and Remus were twins in ancient Roman mythology, which some legends held were raised in the wilds by wolves.

‘Ha!’ he thought derisively, draining the last drop of firewhiskey from the bottle and flopping down on the bed. ‘I was even named after the weaker of the twins, the one that ended up being slain by his brother. Maybe if I had been named after the stronger one instead, maybe I would have turned out to be braver, or at least quick enough.’ Quick enough to have outrun the werewolf Fenrir Greyback, who infected him all those years ago, that is. Sometime he wondered if it was his fate to become a werewolf, even before he was born. Did his mother have the gift of prophecy when she named him Remus? He felt like he was twice cursed, first by his given name Remus, and secondly by his last name Lupin, which also meant wolf. ‘Wolf-wolf... might just as well have been woof-woof. ‘R.J. Wolfe’, such a thin disguise he thought as stared up at his ceiling.

POUND! POUND! POUND! POUND!

“I swear if they don’t quit that racket soon, I may not be able to stop myself from having a midnight snack.” R.J. growled and barred his razor sharp teeth as he rolled over pulled a pillow over his head in an effort to drown out the pounding noise and the dust filtering down from the apartment directly above. “Gods! What lives up there? Elephants?”

One floor up a large man with no neck was working himself up into a state of righteous indignation.

“Petunia! I swear the renter below keeps vicious dogs! I knew this was a bad idea. I don’t care if it is only temporary until the insurance company comes through. This neighborhood is not populated by our kind of people. I will not stand for it much longer! You just march upstairs right now and tell those... those... freaks to put our house to rights! They’re the cause it of it! They should fix it! I WANT MY HOUSE! I WANT MY CAR! I. WANT. MY. GOLF. CLUBS!” Vernon punctuated each word by alternating stomping on the floor and ramming the shaft of his putter (the only club he had left) into the ceiling.

One floor up, they rolled their eyes and took deep breaths, counting to ten.

“Dearest? Do you think it would be too much to ask for a little appreciation?” James asked Lily raising his eyebrows at the yelling coming from the flat below. “After all we could have let them get what they deserved. We didn’t have to rescue them.”

“Yes we did James. No matter what they did, she is still my sister, and Dudley is still my nephew.”

“Well, we could have left Vernon there anyway.” James sighed with resignation. “I don’t think with all he’s fuss he’s made these past seven weeks that Petunia would have cared that much.”

“Possibly true,” Lily laughed quietly as she got up with the sleeping Holly to put her to bed. “But we still need his cooperation until everything is final, and besides he is our Brother-In-Law.”

“No he’s not. He flatly denied it, and far be it for me to dispute his opinion. He may be your in-law but to me he’ll always be an outlaw.” James said firmly, gently leaning the sleeping Harry over into the space vacated by Lily and pulling the sofa pillow under his head. “That is the biggest regret I have about telling them about the flat downstairs...”

“What’s that honey?” Lily asked as she came back into the living room and started pulling off her sleeping son’s shoes and socks. After tucking the soft blanket around him, she kissed him gently on the forehead, her eyes lingering over his sleeping form.

“Harry still doesn’t have his own room. He doesn’t even have his own bed! When it came up for rent I was thinking we could move into that larger flat ourselves, it was only a few pounds a month more, no stairs, and then we would have had a second bedroom for the kids. Harry deserves a real bedroom and a real bed after that cupboard.” James face grew hard and he shook his head. “You didn’t see it Lils, it makes me ill to even think about it. No wonder he wanted to die. And he’s no better off with me. I’m a bad father.”

“You are NOT a bad father! And I won’t hear you talking like that!” Lily admonished him in hushed tones so as not to wake Harry. “Now

come to bed. You're just tired. It's been a long week, and you worked double shifts almost every day."

"Just wanted to make sure I'd have all weekend free to play with Harry and Holly." James shrugged nonchalantly as if it was inconsequential.

"See! You ARE a great father!" Lily said kissing him soundly and dragging him off to bed. As the little family snuggled down for the night, one floor below a volcano was seething.

"Vernon! Shush!"

"Don't you shush me! I will NOT BE SHUSHED!" Vernon bellowed at the ceiling, his face turning a florid red, as Dudley, eating a doughnut for a midnight snack, emerged from the kitchen to see what was going on.

"Vernon! Please..." Petunia pleaded sheltering Dudley behind her from her irate husband. "...you're upsetting Duddykins!"

"No he's not Mum." Dudley piped up. He thought it quite entertaining to see his father upset at his new aunt and uncle, VERY entertaining. And he liked to do anything he could to help stoke the fire, because there really wasn't much else to do in this puny flat. His X-Box, Wii, computer, and all of his toys had burned to a crisp when their house went up in flames on Christmas day. The only thing he had rescued was his new BB gun. And nobody would let him shoot it. It just wasn't fair! He'd like his telly back too, just as much as his dad wanted his golf clubs. But until that happened, this was cheap entertainment. If it weren't for his dad's temper tantrums, he wouldn't have anything to do but his homework. And thinking about writing a poem was the last thing he wanted to do with his weekend.

"Still you know very well why we have to stay here! It's the only safe place! You saw those... those... horrible people with the masks and capes! Those... Death Eaters! They could have killed us!" she gasped, turning pale at the memory. "They could have killed Dudley!"

Vernon's eyes narrowed as he contemplated his grinning son, as if seeing for the first time that he was still up. "Dudley! Off to bed young man. This discussion is not for your tender ears."

"Aw Dad! It was just getting good!"

"You heard your father Diddledums. Now off to bed, Mummy will be in soon to tuck you in."

Dudley glared behind him as he went to his bedroom. Carefully leaving the door cracked a smidge behind him.

As soon as he was out of sight Vernon hissed to Petunia, "I tell you, they weren't after us! They wanted that little freak! And if he had still been locked up in the cupboard, where I put him, where he rightfully belonged, they could have had him. And we would still be in our own home. Where we should be!"

"Vernon! You can't... you don't mean that! He may be a freak, but he's just a boy! You wouldn't have given him to those horrid people!"

"Don't you 'Vernon' me Petunia. And I do mean it. You would have done it too, and you know it. It's his fault we lost our house and belongings. It's his fault we're stuck in this rat hole! And I demand satisfaction!"

"And just what 'satisfaction' can you get out of a nine-year-old?"

"I can make his life just as miserable and he's made mine. That's what satisfaction!"

"And just how do you intend to do that?"

"All this 'adoption' nonsense that's how! Seems to me if those two up there," he said pointing at the ceiling "were as serious about claiming the boy as they say they are, they would do it under their own names and leave us out of it. Not put us through all these legal shenanigans and hocus-pocus. Making us out to be uncaring oafs, who would foist their family obligations off on total strangers, when we already spent eight years raising the boy out of the kindness of our hearts! 'Krueger'

indeed! I bet they are running from the law or some such nefarious thing. Not fit parents if that's so. Until I sign those final papers I have a say so, and I intend to put a stop to the whole thing."

"Why would you do that Vernon? I thought we wanted to be rid of him! With him around we're in danger!"

"Nonsense Pet! Seems to me we were only in danger once he left. I intend to get him back, lock him in that cupboard, and throw away the key. Once I get him back, he's never leaving again."

"But he'll starve won't he?"

"I'll put in a cat flap and then we can just push food through the door occasionally, and not have to be bothered with him traipsing about underfoot."

"But they'll never agree to that! You saw what happened. James... he can be so... violent!" she said with a shudder.

"If he tries anything, I'll just call those Death Eaters back to deal with him. They wanted to know where the boy was. Didn't know at the time, but I do now. And one of them left a card, a Mr. Malfeasance or some such. I'll keep the boy for protection and they can have the pair of them, and that blasted baby too. All it does is cry all the time anyway. That ought to satisfy them, three for the price of one. And you know what they say 'fight fire with fire. Should hold true for all that thingamagiggy nonsense too."

"Vernon... do you think that's wise?"

"Oh very wise indeed. I will do anything to protect my family from that ma-maj- that tommyrot!"

"Oh Vernon! You're so brave!" Petunia fawned as she led him off to bed, forgetting all about tucking in her son, and never noticing his blond head and big ears quickly withdrawing as they passed by, or the second bedroom door quietly closing.

One floor up, one little dark haired boy heard everything too. Vernon's yelling had woken him up. Padding quietly into the bedroom dragging the blanket behind, he climbed up in the wooden rocker. He could hear the quiet reassuring breathing of his parents and baby sister. He determinedly sat up very straight and alert. It was up to him to protect Prince Charming, Sleeping Beauty, and Princess Holly from the Evil Wizard and his minions, and he would too, even if he had to stay up all night to do it!

Two floors below, R.J. was in the painful throws of transformation, clawing at the boarded up window. In his altered state, the muffled talk of Death Eaters could have been coming from anywhere, including his own nightmares. James and Lily in danger? It was a dream he had had regularly for eight years. Replaying that Halloween night over and over in his head until he felt he would go insane. Always arriving too late to save anyone. His family all gone, James and Lily Potter lost, little Harry dead by Voldemort's hand and Sirius falsely accused of betraying them all, and then killing Peter to cover it up. Within twenty four hours, he had lost everything that mattered to him.

Harry... the little dark haired muggle boy in his class was also named Harry. R.J. closed his yellow eyes and tried to push the image of Harry's face out of his brain but it wouldn't go. They would have been about the same age, the same dark hair, and the same green eyes. The muggle boy reminded him so much of James it hurt to be in the same room with him sometimes. If only Harry Krueger could have been his Harry. His honorary godson. But it couldn't be so. His Harry was dead. Sirius had told him that himself that horrible night.

Sirius had arrived back in Godric's Hollow in terrible condition. His hands burned, robes scorched, totally physically and magically exhausted. Sirius had told him that at the last minute, he and Peter had exchanged roles as secret keeper, only to find out from his brother Regulus, who was a servant of Voldemort, that Peter had betrayed that trust and told Voldemort where to find them. Sirius had rushed to Godric's Hollow, but was too late to warn them of the attack. He told him that he had been able to rescue both James and Lily from the rubble, and that they were in critical condition, but that they were safe in the hands of muggle healers. The rest of his ramblings were

incoherent, as he was out of his mind with grief over not also being able to save his godson.

Every time R.J. dreamt about that night, it started out differently. In his dreams, he had the foresight to stun Sirius until he came to his senses, but then his nightmares would take over and the event would relentlessly unfold as they had time after time after time. By the time he thought to do anything, Sirius had roared off on his motorcycle after Peter. Sirius' grief clouding his judgment, until his all consuming desire for revenge took possession and transformed him, much akin to how the Lycanthrope transformed R.J. each full moon, neither one able to stop the crushing tide.

Then word came that Peter was dead and that the Aurors had arrested Sirius and put him in prison without so much as a trial. Everything was in turmoil, with so many unsubstantiated rumors about James and Lily being dead floating around, it was enough to make his head swim, and people were actually celebrating! His family was gone and people were partying! He had even received an urgent message from Albus Dumbledore. The old goat! How dare he try to spin this catastrophe in a positive light! He didn't even back Sirius up when Sirius said he wasn't James and Lily's secret keeper. Albus contradicted it, sealing Sirius's fate behind the doors of Azkaban.

In disgust, he had never even bothered to read the message, instead he lit it on fire, sent the ashes back to Dumbledore with his phoenix Fawkes, packed his bags, and within hours of Sirius's arrest left the magical world behind, vowing never to return until he had proof of Sirius's innocence. And that proof lay in the muggle world with James and Lily. He knew with every fiber of his being that Sirius was innocent, but he needed to find James and Lily alive somewhere to prove it. The only problem was that Sirius had been so consumed by his anger at Peter that night, that he never told him where he had hidden them. By the time that he realized he was missing that crucial piece of information, Sirius was out of reach and out of communication behind the walls of Azkaban. For eight long years, he had been checking out every muggle hospital on the globe that he thought held even the remotest possibility. He went every place he could think of that Sirius or James ever mentioned having visited, and thousands they had not, just on the off chance. But he never found a

trace of them. Sirius may not have been their final choice for secret keeper but he was by far the best.

Pumped up by adrenaline and his pent-up frustrations, Remus Lupin the werewolf, a.k.a. R.J. Wolfe paced the entire night, smashing to splinters every stick of furniture in the flat, and all but ripping the door off its hinges, only the multiple locks and deadbolts he had installed hours before preventing it.

The dim light of dawn was filtering through the narrow cracks around the boarded up window when he finally fell exhausted to the mattress, which by this time was lying haphazardly on the floor, the bed frame long since reduced to toothpicks. Too bad that the boy Gordon hadn't been right about a stake through the heart, R.J. thought wryly as he pulled an especially sharp piece out from under him and tossed it aside. He deserved it after eight years and nothing to show for it. He had come back to England with his tail between his legs like a beaten cur. He was no closer to finding the Potters now than he was that fateful night. He was no closer to freeing Sirius from Azkaban. He was a failure. He was pitiful. And he was... hungry.

As the smell of morning bacon sizzling in the flats above him filled the air, his stomach rumbled and he rolled over, ending up on another shard of wood, but he was too tired to do anything about it but groan. Unfortunately, that just set off another round of protesting pounding from the tenants above him.

POUND! POUND! POUND!

"I swear Petunia! The tenant below must be holding illegal dog fights in the flat below! Such growls and noises! All night long! COULDN'T. SLEEP. A. BLOODY. WINK!" Vernon said pounding on the floor with his club and doing a fair imitation of growling himself.

"Really Vernon? I didn't hear a thing."

"That's because you took enough sleeping pills last night to put you into a coma." Vernon snorted dropping the club and taking his place at the kitchen table and digging into his breakfast. Petunia had loaded his plate with piles of greasy eggs and stacks of burnt toast and

incinerated bacon. A second identical plate awaited Dudley, whose heavy footsteps could be heard just getting out of bed.

“Duddy! Come to breakfast! It’s getting cold.” Petunia called out as she nibbled on her wedge of grapefruit.

“No thanks Mum! I’m going out. Be back tonight.” Dudley called back as the front door slammed behind him.

“Hrumph! That boy has no appetite lately. Not surprised forced to live in a hovel like this.” Vernon said pulling the second plate over, and to Petunia’s look of disapproval added, “No need to let it go to waste.”

One floor up Dudley rang the bell.

“May I come for breakfast Auntie Lily?” he asked sweetly and with his best manners as his aunt opened the door.

“Of course Dudley, I told you that you are always welcome here as long as you behave, come in.” She welcomed him opening the door wide. “Harry was just showing me his omelet making skills. I think it is just wonderful how Petunia taught you boys how to cook.”

“Oh no Auntie, she just taught Harry.” Dudley said innocently ignoring the looks he was getting from his cousin.

“Oh? Why not you too?” James asked suspiciously putting down the newspaper he was reading.

“Because, I’m too delicate for chores.” He smirked.

“Chores? Your mum had Harry cook as a ‘chore’? What else did Harry do as chores that you didn’t?” Lily questioned, she hadn’t been able to pry much out of her son about how he had been mistreated by her sister, she had only a hint there, a slip of the tongue there, and suspicions galore. Maybe her nephew would be more forthcoming. He seemed to like to talk. Her eyes started to flash dangerously as she determinedly took the spatula away from Harry and shooed him to the couch muttering under her breath ‘...there will be no more

cooking for you young man! Cooking as a chore indeed! You're only nine! What was she thinking?!

"Everything."

"Everything? What do you mean 'everything'?" James asked through gritted teeth. Even without answering, he knew what Dudley would have said from the frantic way his son was shaking his head to get him to shut up.

"Really it wasn't that much! I just... I just helped out around the house and the garden some is all, to pay for... well you know."

"No, I don't know Son. Tell me."

"...to pay for my... my keep, and because..." Harry said softly.

"Because why honey?" Lily prodded gently as she passed out the food.

"Cause he was always causing trouble! That's why!" Dudley supplied, the glares from all three of the others in the room bouncing off him, as oblivious, he stuffed a big bite of the tasty ham and cheese omelet into his mouth. 'Yes! Much better pickings up here!' he thought grinning from ear to ear and licking a stray morsel of egg off his fork.

After Dudley finished, not only one but two omelets (being denied a third by his prudent aunt), James and Lily bundled up the baby, packed a picnic, and took the boys to the play park, where they watched carefully to make sure the 'play' remained 'play', Dudley having a tendency to edge toward bullying whenever they turned their backs. There were only a few suspicious times when Harry became very quiet after Dudley whispered in his ear. But since Harry nodded in agreement, to what ever it was Dudley was saying, nothing seemed terribly amiss.

Lily felt encouraged, as she wasn't ready to give up on her nephew quite yet, even though James was. She was hopeful that with careful guidance, and their influence, that perhaps Dudley might overcome his parents spoiling, so she pleaded with James to try to be

welcoming to him too. As he seldom denied her anything she truly wanted, he was right now playing a game of tag with both boys, giving her a much needed break from batting practice (even James didn't have a fast ball that compared to hers), even though he had planned the whole weekend around special one-on-one bonding time with just his son.

Harry on the other hand, was relieved by Dudley's presence for a change, as an intervention tool between him and his parents. He saw the looks they were giving each other at breakfast and it made his stomach do flip-flops. He had tried so very hard to keep the fact that he was a constant troublemaker from them, and then there it was... blurted out in front of both of them in words that couldn't possibly misunderstand. And while Dudley was the source of the information, he was also the means to preventing further discussion around it. As long as Dudley was with them, he doubted that his mum and dad would ask him to explain further or to make him confess all his sins.

They had already gotten upset when they woke up and found him asleep in the wooden rocking chair in their room. He felt ashamed that he had fallen down on his duty, but he really had tried his best to stay awake all night! He really had! That should count for something, he thought, but his dad just seemed angry and his mum sad. He should have known better than to try and get too close when they didn't even want him to call them Mum and Dad. And it was getting so hard not to, as that was what he was calling them in his mind. So he had tried to make a special breakfast for them to apologize, and then Dudley spoiled it.

So far, his mum hadn't let him do any chores around the flat. She said it was too small to get messy to begin with, and laughed that if even one thing got out of place they wouldn't be able to get in the door. But Aunt Petunia always liked it when he cooked the meals so she didn't have to, so he thought maybe he could do that at least. In fact, Aunt Petunia not only preferred him to cook the meals she demanded it. But his mum wouldn't even let him finish that peace offering. How was he supposed to earn his keep, so they wouldn't mind him being there, if they wouldn't let him do anything? And now with this new ammunition against him... it just made him dread Dudley leaving... kind of ironic.

But he didn't have to worry. After the day in the park, they were all tired and a bit dirty, so they polished off the remainder of the picnic lunch as a light supper then Lily sent Dudley home and sent Harry to take a bath and get ready for bed.

'Maybe they forgot!' Harry thought hopefully while he changed into his new pyjamas, reveling in the feel of the soft cotton on his clean skin, always before he just had an old too big t-shirt of Dudley's to wear at night. When he came out, the living room was dark so he curled up on the couch where he slept at night and pulled the soft blanket up to his chin, trying not to be disappointed. He had only hoped they would forget about what Dudley said, he hadn't wanted them to forget about him altogether! He hadn't been with them long, and it was the first night they forgot, but he was already missing not being tucked in and being kissed goodnight. They must be even angrier with him than he thought.

Through the closed door, he could hear the rising voice of his mum and dad arguing in the bedroom. As their voices suddenly quieted, and the door was cracked open, he shut his eyes quickly and pretended to be asleep. It wouldn't do for them to know he was still awake, not after being caught out of bed this morning! No, it wouldn't do at all! His Aunt and Uncle had always gotten upset when they found him outside of his cupboard instead of in it.

"He's already asleep Lil." James whispered, disappointed at missing the opportunity of putting him to bed.

"Poor little guy, all tuckered out." Lily said tiptoeing over and kneeling down beside the couch, she tucked his small hand under the blanket, and placed kiss on his forehead. "You're right James. This isn't working out at all. He can't keep sleeping on the couch. We got him some pyjamas and a change of clothes, but they are barely adequate, and he needs so much more. Children cost a lot of money, and the pantry is almost bare. What are we going to do?"

"I don't know, and there's Holly to think of too." James said running his fingers absently through his hair in thought. "There just isn't room for four in this flat. When we rented it, we thought it would just be

three, and a baby is small... a nine-year-old is a lot bigger. Maybe... maybe it's time."

"Oh, James, no! Are you sure we can't wait a little while longer? I know I said I wanted to, and I do, but I'm not sure if I'm ready to leave... not yet."

"I don't think we have much choice anymore Lily."

"Okay." Lily sighed with resignation. "If you're sure James. When?"

"The end of the week. I'll talk to my boss on Monday."

"How about Harry? Should we tell him we're leaving?"

"No," James said after some thought while he lightly fingered his son's damp hair. He remembered the discussion just the night before about werewolves. At the time, he hadn't thought the discussion had been enough to cause his son nightmares, but waking up to find him curled up in the rocker in their room disputed that fact. He should have known it would. He should have been more aware. He should have been more in tune to his needs. He had forgotten for a moment that Harry had been raised by muggles, and didn't know anything about their world, he wouldn't forget again. So if just that little bit of talk about the wizarding world was too traumatic, then letting his imagination run wild for a week was not a good idea. Best wait and introduce him to it in person where he could see all the wonderful things it had to offer for himself. "No, no need to worry him."

As they slipped back into the bedroom, a pair of bright green eyes filled with tears flew open. They were leaving because of him! And not just because of him, they were leaving him! It was just as Uncle Vernon always said, he thought with a sob. He cost too much, ate too much, and took up too much room. Well he certainly didn't need any more clothes! He had more now than he had ever had before, and he could quit eating breakfast too. He really didn't need to eat much. But what could he do about taking up too much room?

His dad said they didn't plan on him and that they didn't have enough room and his mum said he shouldn't be sleeping on the couch. They

were right he thought with a start, he hadn't really thought about it before but with him sleeping on the couch, he was monopolizing most of the flat, the kitchen-living room being combined into one room. When he was using it as a bedroom, his parents didn't have anywhere they could go but the bathroom or their own bedroom, and with him here, they were forced to share their room with Holly.

Uncle Vernon always liked having the living room just for family, and Harry hadn't even been allowed in it unless he was vacuuming or dusting. He should have realized that his dad probably wanted the living room to himself too. Where could he go that he wouldn't be in the way so that they would stay and not leave him? They were mad when they found him in their chair, and he couldn't sleep in the bathtub, the bathroom really wasn't big enough for more than one at a time, it wasn't like the restrooms at school. His uncle had put him in the cupboard under the stairs to get him out of the way, and his aunt seemed to think that was the proper place for him too, but this flat didn't have a cupboard in it... or... did it?

He remembered seeing the edge of a little door in the bedroom. It was a very small door, right at floor level, behind the crib. He wouldn't have ever noticed it except that he had crawled under the crib to fetch a rattle that Holly had flung on the floor. The door led to a tiny little recess in the rafters of the roof that extended over the larger ground floor flat. Maybe that would do!

Delighted with his plan, he quickly gathered up his few scattered things and put them in a pile. There! The room looked tidier and larger already he thought with satisfaction. Then looking at his meager stack of belongings, he fingered the soft warm blanket. It really wasn't his, and his mum needed it when she was sitting on the couch with Holly. His mum's feet got really cold. Then he looked at the little sofa pillow. His dad said they got it just for him, but his dad also liked to use it when he napped on Sunday afternoons. His mind made up, he quickly pulled them out of the pile and placed them carefully back on the couch. The rest easily fit into his book bag from school. Holding his bag, he sat quietly in the dark until he heard the rhythmic breathing of his sleeping parents, then he slipped into the bedroom and through the little door under the crib.

It was a tight fit, very dusty, and even smaller than his cupboard had been. And while his cupboard at least had had a thin mattress, this cubby had two definite advantages: he would be out of the way, but he would still be close enough to protect them from the evil wizard while they slept, and it was so tiny there wasn't even room to lie down unless he curled up really small, so there was no danger of him falling asleep! Now, if he just didn't eat too much, there was no reason for them to leave, he thought with a contented yawn as he pulled his book bag in beside him and leaned back with his knees pulled up to his chest, before losing the fight with the pull of gravity on his heavy eyelids.

"James! Harry's gone!" Lily's frantic voice woke James from a sound sleep.

"Wha'?" he yawned back.

"I can't find him anywhere."

"What do you mean you can't find him? He's not that small and the flat not that big..."

"I think he ran away."

"Why do you think that?" James asked sleepily from the bed as he managed to get one leg out from under the covers and his foot hit the cold floor.

"His clothes are all gone." Lily called back.

"What about the pillow I got him? And the blanket?"

"No, they're still here."

"Then so is he. He wouldn't have left them behind if he had run away. Everybody knows you have to take your pillow and blanket with you. That's the first rule of running away... or maybe the fifth... it's hard to remember. It's been a while."

"Then where is he?" Lily said desperation edging into her voice.

“Don’t know Lils, let’s look again,” James said stretching as he groggily got out of bed. “Now if I were nine years old, where would I hide? AHA! GOTCHA!” He shouted out as he dropped suddenly to the floor and peered under the bed, only to add a sheepish, “um... maybe not.” After checking the bathroom, kitchen-living room, and the bedroom twice, then a third time just to be sure, James was starting to feel as frantic as Lily looked.

“Do you think... Death Eaters...?” Lily’s voice trailed off, her face paled at the thought.

“No, definitely not. The alarms would have gone off. I have more protection spells around this flat than Hogwarts has. He wasn’t taken out of here unwillingly without our knowing.”

“Then where is he James? Where?”

“I don’t know,” James enveloped her in his arms to calm her shaking, “but we found him once, we can find him again. I tell you one thing though, when we do find him, I’m putting a tracking spell on him.”

“A tr-tracking spell?” she hiccupped.

“It’s either that, or I don’t let him out of my sight ever again.”

“How about both?” Lily sobbed quietly in his arms until the sounds of Holly’s crying finally pulled them out of the embrace. Lily put out a hand to stop James as he started towards their bedroom to checkup on Holly.

“I best see to her myself, that’s her ‘I’m hungry’ cry.”

“No that’s her ‘I’m wet’ cry. I’d know it anywhere. But I’ll still let you take care of it.” James teased pushing her towards bedroom while trying not to show how concerned he was. As soon as they took care of Holly’s needs, they would go searching for Harry and they would find him he vowed. He turned to the dresser to get his clothes, only to be stopped once more, this time by Lily’s hushed whisper at the bedroom door.

“James!... Come here! Quickly!”

“What?”

“Sshush! Quiet... just look...” she said nodding toward the cracked open door. James tiptoed to peer inside to see Harry gently rocking baby Holly in the old wooden rocker, rubbing little circles soothingly on her back.

“Where did...? But I looked...? How...?” James started to ask but stopped as Lily shook her head and held a finger to his lips to silence him.

“There, there, Holly. You’re all right. I’m here. You’re not all alone. You have a nice dry nappie now and you’re all comfy again.” Harry crooned as he cuddled his baby sister until she was all smiles and giggles again. “Don’t worry I’ll protect you. I’ll never leave you.”

Lily quietly shut the door and turned to James, anguish in her eyes. “He doesn’t trust us, does he? He still thinks we’re going to leave him again, and he probably thinks we’ll abandon Holly too. We still don’t have him back in spirit do we? He doesn’t love us. He-he won’t even call me m-m-mum!” she started to wail.

“There, there, Lily. It’ll be all right. We’ll be all right.” James took her in his arms and crooned in her ear, unconsciously echoing Harry’s words to Holly. “I’ll talk to Vernon today. I’ll make him quit dragging his feet. We’ll get this adoption matter settled. Maybe that will make Harry feel more secure. Then we’ll head for Hogwarts. Dumbledore should know what’s been happening. We’ll find Sirius and Moony, then we’ll all make a home somewhere for Harry and Holly where they’ll grow up safe and strong and happy. We love him, and we’ll just keep after him, until he knows it too. We’ll get our son back, all of him, body and heart, I promise.”

“..you p-promise?”

“I promise, unbreakable vow promise.”

“Unbreakable? But, James!” Lily started to protest.

“Shush my love. Yes ‘unbreakable’ because I will never stop trying, and if we don’t succeed, I don’t think I could live with it anyway so it won’t matter.”

“Then I promise too, unbreakable vow promise.”

As James and Lily kissed to seal their pledge, two floors below, another unbreakable vow was being made.

After R.J. swept up the rubble in his flat, he sat on the bare cement floor of his self-made prison and leaned tiredly back against the rough unfinished cement walls. It was fitting surroundings he thought, why should he be any better off than Sirius? “After I get through this teaching job, I’m going to get Sirius out of Azkaban. I don’t know how without James and Lily... but I will.”

“But first, I still have to get through this teaching job.” Pulling his satchel out of the rubble he rubbed his eyes and tried to concentrate on the fledgling starts of the poems that his students had worked on Friday, they would want feedback on the morrow.

One floor up, one of the budding poets, sat poking his fork at his disgusting looking stack of cold limp pancakes. He could smell the tantalizing odors wafting down from above, but after he had spent the entire day Saturday with his relatives, his mum had put her foot down this morning. She wanted her little ‘Duddykins’ all to herself. After temper tantrums didn’t help, he surrendered to his fate. Babyish nicknames aside, he guessed he could at least get a trip to the cinema and a new computer game out of it. But he did wonder what Harry was having for breakfast. It had to be better than this.

One floor up, Harry was avoiding eating the very meal that Dudley was jealous of him over, saying he had already eaten a banana and some toast before they got up, and he was really quite full. He hated lying to his mum, and his mouth was watering over the smell of the French toast, but he remembered what she had said about the panty being almost bare. He wasn’t surprised after how many times Dudley

had decided to show up for meals. Given the opportunity, Dudley could eat enough for two.

Now all he had to do was get through lunch, supper, and one more breakfast, without his tummy rumbling and he would be back at school and fine. He just had to drink a lot of water until then, and when the school week started he could pretend to pack his own lunch, so that shouldn't be a problem. Once he was back at school, he could usually find something to eat that someone had tossed out. That's what he used to do when he lived with his aunt and uncle and got hungry. He'd had lots of practice. He could do it again. But what he hadn't counted on was one BIG difference between his mum and his aunt, his aunt only cared when he ate her food, his mum cared when he didn't.

Lying in bed that night, Lily snuggled her head under the crook of James arm and ran her finger down his chest. In response, he pulled her closer. He knew that particular touch. That was her 'you-better-not-be-sleeping-because-I'm-not-sleeping-and-we-need-to-talk' touch.

"Penny for your thoughts."

"You don't have a penny."

"Touché my love. Okay, tell me on credit then, surely I'm good for it." James smirked. They both knew that once they returned to their world they would be more than well off, as James was the only child and heir of one of the wealthiest families in the wizarding world.

"Okay, but just this once more, your tab is getting fairly high. I'm just worrying about Harry."

"What about him?"

"I don't think he ate all day."

"He didn't? I could have sworn I saw of short version of me at supper, sitting right next to me on the couch."

“Oh he was there, he just didn’t eat. He pretended to, but he didn’t. He just pushed the food around with his fork. And he seemed tired all day... I thought maybe he was coming down with something, but I checked and he didn’t have a fever. And the couch! That’s another thing... he seemed really reluctant to even sit on it with us, and it’s not as if there is a wide choice of seating. And I still can’t find where his things went to.”

“Did you ask him?”

“No. I thought about it, but if he doesn’t trust us enough that he feels he has to hide his things, I don’t want to start grilling him and making him feel even more defensive. What are we doing wrong James?”

“Not sure. We’ve never had a nine-year-old before to raise, to compare it too. And in our defense, it’s kind of a big jump between toddler and tot. We missed a lot of the parental training that leads up to this age. Maybe it’s just a natural phase?”

“Maybe...” She just had a nagging suspicion that there was more than they thought going on in that little brain.

“Let’s give it a few days hon. Maybe it’ll just work itself out if we give it a little time. Like the adoption counselor said, it’s a period of adjustment, we have to get used our tiny baby boy suddenly being three feet taller, and he has to get used to parents who actually care.” He said thinking derisively of the non-caring attitude by the adults in his life that his son had grown up with until now.

“Your right, of course, that is what the counselor said.” Lily agreed reluctantly.

“Of course I’m right.” He said smugly, unbeknownst that his sentiments were being echoed one floor below.

‘Of course I’m right.’ Vernon said just as smugly to Petunia as he climbed into bed. “That brother-in-law of yours was willing to agree to anything I asked in exchange for my signature.”

“So what did you ask for?”

“Well our house to be rebuilt, only naturally with all the improvements we would have made if we hadn’t had the burden of taking care of his wretched offspring all these years.”

“Naturally! What else?” Petunia asked greedily.

“Of course to have my car replaced with a new one, top of the line, and one for you as well.” He said to Petunia’s gratified giggle. “Then all of our personal items restored exactly as they were before all this nasty business, and our names on the deed to a nice summer home in Majorca.”

“Oh Vernon! Majorca!” Petunia breathed heavily at the mere thought of her fondest desire being fulfilled. “Do you really think they’ll pay for all that?”

“They better, if they want my cooperation. My reputation as a pillar of the community is worth at least one vacation home if not two. Perhaps I should demand a winter ski chateau in the Alps as well.” He pondered thoughtfully. “And besides, I’m tired of waiting on the insurance company. ‘Suspicious Circumstances’ my foot. Any fool can see it was utterly destroyed. What’s suspicious about that?”

“But what if it happens again? What if those- those people come back? Didn’t you say we needed the boy there for our protection?”

“Been rethinking that. And I decided that it’s best not to take the boy back after all. That Mr. Malevolence seemed an intelligent type. It was obvious after he turned our house into cinders that the boy wasn’t there and we didn’t want him. He’d be a fool to waste his time looking for him there again, and he didn’t seem a fool. No, I doubt if there is any danger left my Pet, so we might as well cash in.”

“You are so clever!” Petunia flattered as Vernon turned off the light and the last tenants awake in the building went to sleep.

Last, except for one that is. One floor up, the last one awake was determined to stay that way. The small dark haired boy, his stomach growling, once again settled into his little hidden cubby to sit vigil over

his sleeping family. When dawn finally started leaking its light into the room Harry was exhausted and felt like a pretzel. Rolling out of his hiding spot his legs felt like a thousand needles were sticking him as he tried to straighten up. But all the discomfort was well worth it, he thought with satisfaction as he took the fussing Holly out of her crib and carried her to the changing table. His family was safe for another day.

After he changed Holly he put her back in her crib, wrote a note telling his parents that he had left for school early, and then he slipped quietly out the door and ran down the stairs. He needed to get away before his mum started worrying over him again, and he wanted to avoid lying to her as much as possible. Glancing back over his shoulder to make sure they hadn't seen him, he jumped down the stairs of the stoop two at a time, not paying attention to where he was going, and ran smack into the tenant from the basement flat as he rounding the corner of the building.

"Whoa there!" R.J. chuckled good-naturedly, steadying them both from falling down. Then, as he recognized the student that had occupied a good majority of his thoughts for the last two days he added, "a little early for school aren't you Harry?"

"Oh hi, Mr. Wolfe! I'm sorry. I didn't mean to run into you."

"That's okay no harm done." R.J. replied. "You live around here?"

"Not just around... I live here." He said pointing at the building that they had both just come from.

"Really? Not the ground floor apartment I hope," he frowned.

"Oh no, Mr. Wolfe, that one is waaayyyy too expensive. And we're on a budget. My cousin lives in that one. We live upstairs."

"Oh, that's nice," he said a bit relieved. He was glad to know that Harry's new family wasn't the source of his pounding headache, and in the same odd way that just putting a name to a mysterious malady will give the sufferer a modicum of relief, he was also glad to be able

to finally put a name to real source. He should have known his classroom headache was the cause of his nightly ones too.

"It is?" Harry looked at him peculiarly.

"Yes. I live in the basement flat. It's good to know who the neighbors are. Where are you off to this early?"

"I... um... nowhere."

"Have you had breakfast yet?" R.J. asked, observing that the little boy was way too thin to be healthy, and he had mentioned that his family was on a budget. Maybe they had similar money problems to his. After all, they did live in the same shabby building. How much money could they have?

"Er... yes?" Harry said meekly, but then shook his head no as his stomach growled loudly to dispute his original answer.

"I thought so, why don't you walk to school with me? I found out if I get there very early, the cooks are making themselves breakfast before they start on the preparations for the hot lunch. They are usually good for a leftover sausage or a scrambled egg or two. How about joining me? I'm willing to share." He said holding out his hand. "That is... if your parent's know where you are. Do they?"

"Oh yes! I left a note!" Harry said very responsibly as he took the offered hand and started pulling his teacher towards the school grounds. He was hungry!

The two had a companionable breakfast at the cook's table in the corner of the bustling school kitchen, before heading to the classroom. Not only did they have sausage and eggs, but hotcakes and thick mugs of cold milk, the head cook being determined to fatten up the ill looking new teacher and his scrawny little tag-along. She never minded feeding anyone who appreciated her food. In payment, she, Remus, and the entire kitchen staff were entertained throughout the meal, by the small boy's lively brags of "MY Dad this... and MY Mum that..." It was very obvious to anyone within earshot that the little boy loved his new parents very much.

Fortified by the ample breakfast, the two prepared the classroom for the day's lessons. Watching Harry pass out the books and materials, he was reminded constantly of his best friend James. The boy and his old friend had much the same movements with their hands, quick, steady, and purposeful. If Harry had been a magical boy, instead of a muggle, he could see him becoming a first rate Quidditch player, maybe a seeker or even a chaser, the same position James played on his house team. If only... but sadly it wasn't. Instead, he started wondering about the boy's complex family life, and thought about the peculiar living arrangements, the boy's former guardians, his aunt and uncle, living in the same building as his new adoptive parents. He supposed that was how they met. But why would an aunt and uncle give custody of their own flesh and blood nephew to non-relatives? Especially one as special as Harry? R.J. shrugged it off. It really wasn't any of his business, but he did hope that the new parents appreciated his little helper as much as he did.

His wool-gathering came to an end as the school bell rang, signaling the start of the day, and the children poured into the class. It was a busy day and it wasn't until the last hour of class that he thought about his admittedly 'favorite' student's family dynamics again. All the children had gotten out their valentines to work on some more, and were busily gluing on finishing touches that they had brought from home. Large red and pink hearts littered every desk and quite a bit of the floor by the time they were done, all desks except for one. Harry only had a plain piece of lined paper on his desk, over which he had been slaving the entire hour, writing and then erasing and rewriting until he had used up almost the entire pencil, but in the end, the satisfaction on his face attested to the results of his labors. But then a peculiar thing happened.

Dudley, who had been idly flipping glue balls at the girls, and making a mess with the glitter, noticed the look too, and went over to his cousin's desk and took the paper. When Harry snatched it back, Dudley whispered something in his ear, Harry went pale, nodded, and handed it over to Dudley. Dudley went back to his own seat with a triumphant look on his face. R.J. was just about to intervene when the final bell pealed and the children scrambled out of the room in a rush, leaving trails of glitter and scraps of red and pink paper behind them.

Gathering up the valentines, R.J. returned them to the craft cupboard, carefully placing each on the proper child's shelf for them, admiring their work as he went.

He had to laugh when he got to Malcolm's card. "The boy is nothing if not honest," he said chuckling at the poem.

I tried to write a poem for you Mummy
but the rime came out kind of crummy.
Oh by the way, that was it.
-Malcolm

Dudley's card was rather unoriginal, being completely covered with solid glitter, other than the random splotch of glue on the bare cardboard where the glitter had fallen off. It looked as if he had spent all of five minutes on it. But even so, R.J. placed it as carefully as he had the other children's cards. When he got to Harry's shelf, he picked up the valentine that Harry had worked on during the weeks before and studied it. No wonder he didn't get it out today, R.J. thought. It was already complete except for the inside message. And it was a masterpiece.

Instead of just gluing construction paper to the cardboard 'shell' that every child had started with, he had completely covered his with a scrap of shiny red satin so that none of the cardboard showed. The front he had carefully padded between the soft material and the cardboard with stuffing, so that the card was three dimensional. Then he had then sewn lace around the outside edge of the back with very even stitches in an embroidery pattern, completely covering the raw edge so it had a very finished look. On top of the red satin, he had placed two overlapping pink hearts made out of pink gingham material. In the middle of the first heart was embroidered a small four legged reindeer like animal wearing a crown. The second heart had a small white flower daisy stitched with a crown for its center. Intertwined through the satin, was a white velvet ribbon encircling both hearts. In the center where the two hearts met, Harry had sewn on a tiny sprig of silk holly. On the inside of the valentine, he had sewn in a folded piece of paper that looked very similar to old parchment. All that was missing was the message. For something

patched together from odds and ends of scraps, it was really quite breathtaking, and an obvious painstaking labor of love.

R.J. wasn't a bit surprised at the detail he had put into it, he had seen him working on it diligently every chance he had been given, and he had no doubt but what the message was what he had been working so hard on today. But why then had he given it to Dudley? R.J. frowned. Something wasn't quite right between his little friend and his cousin. He would have to keep both an eye and an ear out. And being part wolf he had keen ones of both. But he didn't spy either Harry or Dudley on his way back to his flat, and other than Dudley's father (as he now knew that was who it was), pounding on the floor above him to 'pipe down' when all he was doing was reading quietly, he didn't hear anything that night.

He rose early both the next two days and walked very slowly to school, hoping that Harry would join him again for breakfast, and perhaps he could carefully draw him out and find out what was going on between him and Dudley. But dawdle as he might, he didn't see Harry either day until class started. And he was almost late at that, dragging in both days at the last minute, and dropping exhaustedly into his seat. The circles under his eyes grew darker every day, and there were several times that R.J. could have sworn he was asleep with his eyes open. He knew something was wrong, and he wanted to help, but it was now Wednesday, Valentine's Day, and his last day teaching. The principal had informed him there had been numerous 'complaints' about his teaching, so they had secured a replacement teacher who would be reporting for duty the next day. R.J. had no doubts about with whom the complaints originated, but he didn't argue. He knew it was time to go. He was seldom in any job more than a month, and he just felt lucky he had kept this one as long as he had.

As the day drew to an end, the children excitedly gathered their valentines to take home to their mothers. As they did, Dudley started bragging about how his valentine was the very best one in the class and how his mum was sure to buy him a present in exchange. R.J. shook his head in wonder at the brag, as he remembered the poorly glittered card. But knowing it was the sentiment and not the quality that made the valentine special, he shook his head again, this time in

sadness that to Dudley the day was still about receiving gifts himself, instead of him giving love to others unconditionally.

Glancing over to Harry, he was equally sad to see the worried look on his little friend's face as he was hurriedly putting his things in his book bag. Slinging it over his shoulder, Harry started to rush out of the room only to be caught by Dudley who whispered in his ear while he crammed something into Harry's hand, and then he reached into Harry's bag, took something, and shoved it in his own. Harry then left dejectedly, dragging his book bag behind him. R.J. wished he had gotten the opportunity to find out what was going on. But try as he might, he hadn't found another opportunity to talk to the boy alone. It was almost as if Harry had been avoiding him. If this was a Hogwarts class, he would have just given him detention, and forced him to stay after class and talk, but this was a muggle primary school and those tactics wouldn't go over very well with the principal. He was tempted to do it anyway, after all, it was his last day so what could the Principal do? Fire him twice? But true to his nature, he hesitated too long and Harry was already gone by the time he had made up his mind.

After cleaning up the room, R.J. took one last look around to make sure everything was in order. A small glint of silver on the floor near Dudley's desk caught his eye, and picking it up, he found it was a door key on a string. Well it would be easy enough to return since he knew where Dudley lived, he thought as he pocketed it. Flipping off the lights and locking the door, he sighed. Time to pack, he told himself, as he headed back to the flat for the last time.

When he arrived home, he first went to return the key, but at the sounds of a heated argument coming from the ground floor flat he decided to just push it under the door instead of knocking. Someone, sooner or later would find it and he really didn't want to get into the middle of a domestic squabble.

Trudging downstairs to the basement flat, he pulled out his trunk and satchel and started to work gathering his belonging. Not that it would take that much time he thought ruefully, just grateful that the pounding from above was not serenading him while he did it. If they knew he was moving out, they would probably be tap dancing instead.

One floor up, Vernon was trying to decide between tap dancing and a throwing a tantrum. James and Lily were sitting in his living room on his couch drinking his tea and spouting some nonsense about being willing to pay him everything he asked for, including the ski chateau, but saying that they were unable to do so until he signed the papers so they could go back to that place. Tommyrot! Once he signed, he'd have no leverage and they disappear in a puff of smoke, just as they did on Christmas Eve. And he knew how that turned out for him - Badly!

"So what will it be 'Potter'? Do you want the boy or not?" Vernon sneered as Petunia handed him a plate with a generous slice of the chocolate cake Lily had brought as a peace offering.

"Of course we want him! How you could you even ask that?" Lily gasped in disbelief.

"Well you have a funny way of showing it. It seems quite simple to me," he said between bites. "Pay me what I want, and I sign. Until then he's legally mine."

"But we can't pay you, not yet. We can't get the money until we go back, and we won't go back without him."

"Well I guess you're in a pickle then aren't you?"

"I swear Vernon, I'll..." James started to draw his wand and start towards his brother-in-law.

"NO JAMES! Remember what the lawyer said? He said they have to give up custody under their own free will or the papers won't be valid. And if they aren't valid here, they won't be valid in our world either. It's part of the Muggle Protection Act."

"That's right, and my free will says no money, no signature."

"Hey Dad! What's going on?" Dudley called out as he came into the room.

“Nothing to concern you Diddydums, why don’t you go play with that nice new game I got you?”

“But its borrrrrring Mum. I’ve already gone through all the levels,” he whined. “I want a new one.”

“Isn’t he just the smartest thing?” Petunia petted Dudley and crooned at Lily.

“Yeah... sure Sis.” Lily said but giving Dudley a disapproving look at his whining.

“Oh Mum! I made you a valentine in school! Do you want it?”

“Of course, my little Duddykins! I would love a valentine from you!” Dudley ran out of the room to get it to a chorus of ‘Isn’t he the sweetest thing!’ from his mother, and ‘That’s my boy! He’s getting to be a real ladies man just like his old man.’ from his father.

“Here you go. Now can I have a new game?” Dudley asked thrusting the card at his mother.

“Oh Duddy! It’s lovely!” Petunia said opening the lace edged red satin card. It had overlapping pink hearts with three oddly incongruous plastic roses glued in the center of each heart and another where they met.

“There are three roses... one for you, one for dad, and one for me.” Dudley said proudly as his mother started to read...

Some mums are thin
And some mums are tall
Some mums are big
And some mums are small
Some mums have short hair
And some have long noses
But mine has smiles of sunshine
And smells like roses
Compared to all the rest
I would have to say

My mum's the best!
- Dudley

"That is the best poem I ever read! And you wrote it all by yourself just for me?" Petunia cried pressing the valentine to her heart.

"Yep... everyone in class made a valentine. We were told we could only make one card so it would be extra extra special, and we were supposed to make it for the one person we loved the bestest in the whole wide world. So everyone made one especially for their mum."

"Oh Duddy!" Petunia fairly swooned. "I love you the bestest too!"

"That's my boy!" Vernon said glowing with pride and taking another bite of cake.

"So what kind of card did Harry make you Lily? I'm sure he did the best he could... of course, it couldn't possibly compare to the lovely one Dudley made me. Dudley always did do better in school than Harry." Petunia gloated waving it under Lily's nose to show it off. At her sister's sad expression she guessed, "Oh dear... he didn't even make you a card. Did he?"

"It's quite lovely Dudley, you did a fine job." Lily stood up abruptly and said quietly. "Let's go James, were not getting anywhere here."

"I'll be back, Vernon. This isn't the end of it."

"Anytime Potter, just bring money with you when you come." Vernon said waving his fork as James slammed the door behind him, and stalked up the stairs, through the living room, and into the bedroom of their flat without stopping.

"I swear Lily, if I don't start getting a little cooperation out of him, he's had it! Does he think we can just print up our own money? I tell you Lily, I am out of patience! We should have let the Death Eaters have him!"

"At this point, I'm not sure if I care what happens to him either." Lily replied as she followed him into the bedroom and closed the door

behind her. Sitting on the couch with Holly on his lap, Harry heard her add, "I tell you, if I have to see him stuff his face one more time with my food, it'll be one time too many," as she closed the door behind her.

Harry couldn't hear the rest, but from the tone of their voices through the closed door, he knew they were both very angry. They were angry about money, and they were angry with him. His dad must have found out he had lost his key! And keys are expensive to replace. He didn't lose it on purpose and he was trying to be cooperative. And he had really tried not to eat, but after sneaking out early that one morning, his mum had prevented him from doing it again and watched him like a hawk until he ate before he left for school.

When they first brought him home to live with them they had been happy all the time, but over the weeks, it had gotten more and more tense. Now they were just fighting all the time. Maybe if he left they would be happy again, he thought sadly. His dad did say there was only room for three. Holly would be okay. She was small, not in the way at all.

"I know I promised I'd never leave you, but you're just too little to come with me Holly. It's better off this way. Uncle Vernon said that the bad men who burned down his house were after me. With me gone, you won't have to worry about the evil wizard and his minions, so you'll be safe." Harry pulled his book bag out from underneath the couch, where he kept it during the day, and made sure all his things were still in it.

"I don't need this." Blinking back the tears, he pulled out the glittery valentine that his cousin had made for his aunt, and crumpling it up in a ball, he tossed it in the dust bin. "Dudley should have kept it along with mine. Guess it's just as well he took mine for Aunt Petunia, I don't think M-mu... Mrs. Krueger would have liked one from me after all."

Then tucking the sleeping Holly in tightly with the blanket, so she wouldn't roll off the couch, he silently slipped out the door.

After a while, Holly tried to wriggle, and noticed she wasn't being held by her big brother anymore. Upon due contemplation (all of two seconds) she decided to protest this unsatisfactory state of affairs... LOUDLY.

"Harry honey? Will you check on Hol... ly..." Lily poked her head out and started to ask, then stopped, as all she found was her wailing daughter. "Harry? HARRY! James! Harry's gone again!"

"Is there a note?" James asked rushing out. "The last time he left us a note." He added frantically searching for it.

"No note, no Harry, just this... Oh, James..." Lily said straightening out the crumpled valentine and holding out for James to read.

My mum is pretty like Petunias
I'm glad she's my mum.

"Okay, so he's not a poet, but at least he got my hair, and he did say he was glad you were his mum!" James said, pointing out the bright side.

"Oh James... don't you see? He didn't mean this for me... he meant it for my sister. She's the one who raised him all these years. Remember what Dudley said? They were supposed to make the Valentine for the person they loved the most? Well it's obvious now why he hasn't been eating or sleeping. He's homesick. He wants to go back. He... he wants Pe-Pet-Petunia... for his... Muuuuummmmmmy not mmmmeeeeee!!!!" She ended in a heartbroken wail loud enough to rival Holly's.

"But they neglected him Lily! I don't care if he does want to go back. I am NOT letting him go! I made an unbreakable vow! They can't have him! He's ours!" James yelled as he stalked out of the apartment.

"James! Where are you going?!"

"TO. GET. OUR. SON. BACK!"

As James stormed down the stairs and started pounding on his brother-in-law's door, R.J. left his basement flat via his private entrance in the back. Taking his satchel and casting a very subtle hover charm on the trunk, so that he could easily pull it behind him, he headed down the pavement looking for a quiet deserted place to stop and summon the Night Bus.

He walked all the way to the play park before he found it. Stepping out to the curb, he put out his wand and summoned the triple-decker purple bus, but just as it appeared and came screeching to a halt in front of him, he heard small hiccupping sobs coming from the direction of the swings. Motioning to the bus driver to wait, he went to investigate. Peering into the dusk, he could just make out a small dark shadow with a head of messy hair.

"Harry? Harry is that you?"

"Yes'm (hiccup) Mr. Wolfe," came the small voice.

"What are you doing out here this time of night?"

"Just... sitting."

"Do you want company?"

"No thank you sir. You're probably too busy." The forlorn little voice answered politely.

"I have all the time you need Harry. Remember? I told the class that if any of you ever needed to talk that I was more than willing to listen." At a small nod from the shadow he continued, "So, do your parent's know where you are?"

"No sir. But it doesn't matter. Dudley was telling the truth, they don't want me. They're leaving, so I am too. It's better for everyone this way." Harry sniffled and wiped his runny nose on his sleeve.

"So you're running away?"

"...yes..."

“Where are you headed? London? America? Antarctica?”

“Oh no, sir! I can't go that far. Daddy said I'm not supposed to cross the street by myself, so I can't go past the play park.”

“Wise man your dad. So what do you mean... ‘They don't want you’?”

“They can't afford to keep me. Mummy said children cost too much money. They need clothes, and food, and a place to sleep.”

“Oh I see. Well, yes, those things are important Harry, but so is love. When there is love, the clothes, food, and sleeping arrangements all seem to just work out somehow. Sometimes not in the most optimal way, but they do work out.”

“Not for me Mr. Wolfe. Nobody wants me. I'm just in the way.”

“Why don't we dispense of the ‘Mr. Wolfe’ and ‘Sir’ stuff, as of today I'm not your teacher anymore so why don't we just be friends? It sounds like you could use one. Just call me Remus. Okay?”

“kay... Re-remus”

“Now Harry, why do you think you're in the way?”

“I heard them say so. And that I eat too much.”

“Is that why you were sneaking out of the house before breakfast, and why you were bringing an empty lunch sack to school?” Remus asked a very startled Harry.

‘How did he know?’

“I am very observant, that's how. Yes, I could even see that question on your face in the dark. You wouldn't make a good Slytherin at all. You need to have more of a poker face for that house. Hufflepuff maybe...”

“Slytherin? Hufflepuff?” Harry asked cocking his head to one side. His dad had mentioned Slytherin and Hufflepuff too, but he also said was sure that Harry would be a Gryffindor when the time came, while his mum kept saying Ravenclaw.

“Never mind. The point I was trying to make was, with some people it is hard to tell what they are really feeling, but with others, like you for instance, it’s written all over your face. Now I can tell by the way you light up when you even think about them, that you love your new parents very much. And I can’t help but think that if they want to adopt you, that they feel the same. And with that much love the money doesn’t matter.”

“I don’t love them. And they don’t love me.” Harry stated matter-of-factly.

“You don’t? Really? Tell me, what did your mum think of the Valentine you made her?”

“I... I didn’t give it to her.”

“Why not?”

“I gave it to Dudley.” Harry said dully.

“You ‘gave’ it to him?”

“Yeah.”

‘Even though I’m not your teacher anymore, I think you need a little vocabulary lesson here. When somebody makes you hand over something that’s yours that’s called ‘coercion’, and when you don’t want to, that called ‘duress’. And if they do it by threatening you, it’s called ‘blackmail’. None of those things is ‘giving’, which implies a certain level of willingness. So now, did you ‘give’ him your valentine or did he ‘blackmail’ it out of you?’

“...blackmail...” came the very quiet answer.

“If I’m not being to nosy, may I ask what he used to threaten you?”

"There were some really bad men who burned down their house... because of me... and... and one of them left his card with Uncle Vernon... and... Dudley... he took it... and he said if I didn't give him my Valentine to give to Aunt Petunia he would call the bad men and tell them where I was... and I... I couldn't let that happen... my parents... and Holly... Holly is so little!"

"Holly?"

"My... my baby sister."

"Oh... on your card, that's who the sprig of holly represented!" Remus said putting together that the symbols on the Valentine held a deep significance for the boy. "What does the white flower and crown mean?"

"Oh, that's Sleeping Beauty's flower. The crown is because she's a Princess." He said matter-of-factly.

"And the little animal is for...?"

"Prince Charming."

"And where were you on the card Harry?"

"I was the ribbon." He said softly.

"The one that was circling the Prince and Princess and baby Holly?"

"Yes..."

"Harry? Why did you put yourself on the outside and not in the hearts with Holly?"

"Because I was protecting them," he answered so quietly Remus could barely hear him.

"And why were you protecting them?"

“Because I... I love them...”

“I thought so. Now why don't we take you back home?”

“Can't.”

“Why not?”

“Lost my key.”

“I believe I can remedy that situation.”

“You can?”

“Yes, I may know where it is. Come on.” He said holding out his hand.

“But... but my valentine! I don't have one for Mummy anymore! Dudley ruined the one I made. He signed the poem and he cut the pictures I made off the hearts and glued plastic flowers over the holes! And I looked and looked, but I couldn't find any more stuff to make a new one! She'll think I don't like her!”

“But you have something far greater to give her.”

“I do? But I don't have nothing to give...” he said searching his pockets and finding only a stick of gum, a smooth rock, and a really neat looking dead bug.

“Time for another vocabulary lesson, ‘Friendship’ is the act of giving and expecting nothing in return, like when I told you that I was happy to give you my time and just want to be your friend, there were no strings attached. And ‘Love’ is the greatest gift you can give, like the love you have for your family. Those are the two greatest gifts of all mankind. So if you just remember these two things, and apply them to your life Harry, you should be fine.”

“Hey! Are you taking the bus or not? Can't wait around all night, got places to go.” an impatient voice called out from the wildly swaying vehicle at the curb.

“Not tonight. Sorry to bother you.”

As the purple bus screeched away from the curb Remus picked up his satchel in one hand and took Harry’s in the other and started back towards his flat, his trunk following behind like a puppy on a leash.

As they neared the building, they could see it was lit up from top to bottom, including his deserted flat.

“I think they’re looking for you.”

“How can you tell Remus?”

“Because that’s the dulcet sound of an anxious loving father searching for a most beloved misplaced son if I ever heard it.”

“I. WANT. MY. SON! Tell me right now where he is Dursley or I’ll make you wish you were dead!”

“I tell you again. I. DON’T. HAVE. HIM!”

“YES YOU DO!”

“NO I DON’T”

“Then why do you have his key?”

“How the bloody hell should I know?! How do you even know it’s his?”

“Because I put a tracking charm on it, that’s how I know!”

“A ‘tracking’ charm?” Remus said puzzled, looking down with curiosity at the boy who was anxiously clutching his hand.

“Yeah. Daddy did that,” he nodded affirmatively.

“Do you know what a tracking charm is for Harry?”

"It's so no matter where I hide from him, Daddy can always find me. That's why I wasn't ever supposed to lose my key. He likes to win at hide-and-seek."

"Where do you hide?" Remus asked amused at the reason and trying hard to keep a straight face.

"In my little cubby-hole in the wall behind the crib."

"Do you hide there a lot?"

"Just at night after Dad and Mum fall asleep."

"Why do you hide then? Shouldn't you be sleeping too?"

"Oh I can't sleep! I have to stay awake in case the bad men come, so I can stop them from hurting my family." He said simply.

Remus kneeled down to Harry's level and looked him in the eyes. "Harry... who are the bad men?"

Harry thought about what his dad had told him about keeping magical things secret, but Remus knew all about the houses of Hogwarts just like his dad and mum did. So since he already knew, maybe it was okay.... "Promise not to tell anyone I told you?"

"Cross my heart."

Harry leaned over close and whispered 'Death Eaters' in his ear.

A ripple of fear at the words ran down his spine. "Death Eaters? Are you sure?"

Harry nodded his head, his eyes large and serious, as the shouting match continued to resonate from the building.

"Daddy's reaaalllllly mad." Harry said reluctant to go in.

"I agree, he does sound a tad put out." Remus said equally reluctant, especially now that he suspected he wouldn't be facing just an irate

father, but an irate wizarding father, who may hex first and ask questions later.

“So Harry, do you have time for me to ask you another question?” Remus asked playing a wild hunch and praying he knew the answer.

“Sure. Go ahead. I’m not in any hurry.”

“On your valentine... the symbols for your parents were an animal and a flower, and you said your father was Prince Charming and your mother Sleeping Beauty...”

“Yeah.”

“Do they go by any other names?”

“Yeah.”

“What?”

“Daddy and Mummy.”

“Um... anything else?”

Harry hesitated and answered slowly, “Jimmy and Rose Krueger?”

At his hesitation, and the question in his voice as he answered, Remus took a deep breath and asked one more question. “Anything else? Maybe something... secret?”

“Oh! Do you mean James and Lily Potter?”

“Yes, those are the ones.” Remus tightened his grip on Harry’s hand as he contemplated the extremely high level of anger his old friend was radiating from inside the building. The magical energy coming off from him in waves was so strong that he could feel it washing over him standing outside on the pavement. He didn’t envy Dursley one bit. He knew how James could be when he was mad.

“Sooooo... Harry?”

“Yeah?”

“Have you ever apparated?”

“What’s that?”

“That when you disappear from one place and then reappear in another, you get kind of a squishy feeling when it happens.”

Harry thought hard, “Once. I think when Daddy took me from Aunt Petunia’s. But I’m not really sure because I had my eyes closed really tight. Oh! Yes! And once all by myself!”

“You apparated by yourself?” Remus said admiringly.

“Yeah... I think that’s how I really ended up on the school roof when Dudley was chasing me.” He admitted sheepishly.

“Ah... well then, you’re an old hand at it. Why don’t we just pop up to your apartment then, and just avoid all this nasty business down here. Sound like a good idea?”

“Yeah!” Harry grinned.

“Okay, picture your living room and hold on tight.” Wrapping Harry tightly in the folds of his robes, Remus turned on the spot apparated them right in front of the comfy couch where Lily lay, clutching a crumpled glittery valentine and sobbing her heart out into the sofa pillow.

“Hi Lily. Mind if I drop in?” Remus said quietly, as her head flew up, her big green eyes red from crying, and glitter from the card decorating her cheeks like sparkly freckles.

“Remus!” she gasped. “We thought you were dead!”

“The feeling’s mutual,” he said wryly.

“How... how did you find us?”

"A little voice told me where you were."

"A little voice?" Lily asked confused, sitting up and rubbing the tears and glitter from her eyes and cheeks.

"Yes, the little voice that belongs to him..." Remus said pulling back the folds of his robe to reveal a shy anxious Harry peeking out.

"Harry! My baby!" Lily cried as she swept him up in her arms book bag and all, hugging him so hard he could barely breathe. "JAMES!!!! JAMES!!!! COME QUICK!"

At her frantic call, a rapid pounding could be heard on the stairs and within seconds James burst through the door, hyped up on adrenalin, wand drawn, and ready to take on whatever was threatening his family. At seeing the dark shape looming over his wife, he sent out a stunning hex before Lily could stop him.

Taken by surprise, Remus went down like a rock.

"Ow! I was hoping to avoid that."

"Remus? My gods! Is that you?"

"Maybe... if I say 'yes' are you going to hex me again?"

"Maybe..." James said through gritted teeth, raising his wand again. "How do I know it's really you?"

"Good question. I suppose you could ask me something that only I would know the answer to."

"Okay... let's see... what did Peeves call you?"

"Merlin!"

"Wrong!" James yelled out preparing to send out another hex.

“No, no, no! That wasn’t my answer! Just my reaction! It was something I was trying to forget. The answer is ‘Loony Loopy Lupin’. Satisfied?”

“Gods! Yes! Remus!” James cried out and pulled his friend to his feet, enveloping him in a bear hug. “You look terrible! And beautiful! Gods! You’re a sight for sore eyes!”

“Thanks... I think.”

“James?” Lily prodded him.

“Yeah Lils?” James said distractedly still hugging Remus for all he was worth.

“James... Remus brought someone important home with him...”

“Sirius?! Is Sirius with you? Where?” He asked, first looking around hopefully for his other friend, and then disappointment painting his face when he didn’t find him standing there. A small sob caught him off guard as Harry, with a stricken look, turned on his heels and ran into the bedroom. Though James was only a split second behind him, by the time he got there Harry was nowhere to be seen.

“Oh Lily! What have I done now? You’d think he had my old invisibility cloak the way he disappears so fast.” James said pulling at his hair as he came back to the living room and flopped down on the couch next to Lily.

“You were just your usual unobservant self.” Lily chided him. “Your prodigal son comes home and instead of seeing him, you just looked right over his head for someone else.”

“I know... I know... you don’t have to remind me.”

“Then you shouldn’t have asked.”

“What do we do now? Where do we look? Remus... where did you find him?”

“At the play park.”

“The play park?”

“You told him that was as far as he could go by himself.” Remus said knowledgably, but as James made a move for the door, added quickly, “...but that’s not where he is now.”

“How do you know?”

“I pay attention.”

“You know Remus you’re just asking for another hex, don’t you?”

“If you do, I won’t tell you where he is.”

“Just out with it man!”

“Before I tell you where he is, don’t you want to know why he’s there?”

James quirked an eyebrow at him. “For someone who’s been gone an awfully long time, you sure seem to know a lot about my son.”

“Lately, I haven’t been as far away as you might imagine.”

“No?”

“No. I’ve been his Primary school teacher for the last month.”

“Ah! Now the discussion about werewolves makes more sense. But still Moony – muggle nine-year-olds? Was that wise?”

“Not my idea. But put that aside, I think I’ve gotten to know Harry pretty well, and he’s a good kid.”

“Yeah he is.” James agreed with pride.

“But he’s also confused. He has apparently been hearing you two talk and only understood part of it, and then from the viewpoint of a

neglected child. He thinks you're angry with him because he is taking up too much room, eats too much, and that you can't afford to keep him. So he thinks you're going to leave him again."

"Oh but that's not tr..." Lily started to protest only to be cut back off by Remus.

"Let me finish... this is the most important part. He is dealing with the rest, in his own way, but he is the most worried that if you do leave, he won't be there to protect you at night from Death Eaters." At the shocked look on their faces he continued, "Yes, your son has been staying up, all night long, after you fall asleep, to guard you from Death Eaters. That's where he is right now."

"But where? He's not in the bedroom... we've looked..."

"In the cubbyhole in the wall behind the crib."

"There's a cubbyhole behind the crib?"

"Apparently. And he found it, a place where he would be out of your way, but still be able to see all three of you to protect you. He's probably listening to us right now, so I think if you both calm down and quit yelling he'll come out on his own in a few minutes."

"I didn't realize..." James and Lily both started simultaneously.

"He's never been in the way...." They both said at the same time again.

"We didn't realize he was worried about any of those things," James said for them both, "And I put up security measures every night. No one could have gotten in here without setting off the alarms. And we we're planning to leave, but not until we could get Dursley to sign the adoption papers so he couldn't ever make a claim on Harry again. We wanted to make sure no one could ever take him away from us. We would NEVER have left without him!"

"Did you tell him?"

"We didn't want to worry him... he's only nine... I know, sounds kind of lame now." James said chagrined.

"You'd be surprised how much nine-year-olds worry, especially, one who has had only himself to rely on."

"I taught Harry's class myself in December, you would have thought I would have realized." Lily said blaming herself. "Remus, do you think he'll ever forgive us now? Will we ever get our son back? Really back? I mean it's been seven weeks and after all this... he doesn't... he won't... even call us Mum and Dad," she whispered.

"Really?" Remus said raising an eyebrow. "That's funny. When I'm with him you're all he ever talks about, in fact, earlier tonight when I asked him what your names were he said they were..." at a small sound behind them Remus wisely shut up and let their attention focus on Harry.

"I... I'm sorry, it's Valentine Day and I... made a valentine in school..." Harry started to try and explain but stopped when he saw his mum's face cloud over and her eyes get wet with tears.

"I know Harry. I found it. And it's okay... it is a lovely valentine and I am sure your Aunt will appreciate it." Lily said sadly holding the glittery card out to him.

"Oh I didn't make that one!" Harry said taking a step back away from it as if it would burn him if it got too close. "I gave the valentine I made in school to Dudley to give to Aunt Petunia." Harry apologized in a small hiccuppy voice, nervously hopping from foot to foot, holding his hands uncertainly behind him.

"Ahem...(cough)..." Remus prodded him.

"...oh right. Dudley blackmailed me and took it."

"The beautiful red satin one with the roses? You... you made that? And the poem? You wrote it for... for Petunia?"

“Oh no!... I mean yes!... I mean I made that one but I didn't make it for... Aunt Petunia... I made it for... for...”

“...for me?” Lily asked apprehensively, her tears starting to dry up at Remus' confirming nod.

“The roses were Dudley's...” Harry added in a rush. “... I had stitched little pictures on the hearts, but Dudley... he cut them off.”

“So this is the one Dudley made? Not you?” She said looking at the gaudy glittery glob still clutched in her hands and started to smile sadly in understanding. “It's so sad...”

“What's that Lil?”

“Dudley... he didn't realize that Petunia would have loved this one even more than the one he stole, because he was the one who actually made it. Just as I would have loved this one... if Harry had made it for me.”

“But... I... I did make you a new one! One from me... I know it's not as perfect as the first one I made... but I did tear it in the shape of a heart.” Harry offered hopefully, thrusting the little piece of paper he been nervously holding behind his back at his mum.

“You didn't have to make me another valentine honey. We're just glad your home safe.” She said taking the proffered token and starting to unfold the little scrap.

“I'm sorry...” Harry said, sure it was going to disappoint her. “It isn't very good... and it isn't... isn't just for you. And I-I didn't have any red paper, or lace, or anything really pretty, but Mr. Wolfe... er... Remus... he said it just needed to be something we wrote ourselves, something that we really meant, to make it a real valentine.”

“I'm sure it's fi...” the rest of the words stuck in her throat as she read the valentine.

“Is it... o-okay?” he asked nervously at her reaction. “I didn't have time to write it cursive.”

Lily just nodded, and passed the valentine to James, as she was unable to speak. Gazing with love at her little boy, with his tear streaked face and messy hair, who was fairly dancing on his tiptoes with anxiety as if ready to take flight at any moment; she dropped to her knees and enveloped him a hug before he could think of escaping again.

Reading the valentine himself James choked out, "It's more than okay Son! It is the best valentine we ever got... it's absolutely perfect!" Dropping to his own knees, he wrapped his arms around them both, making Harry into a squashed Harry sandwich.

Feeling a small pang of envy at being left out of the heartwarming scene, Remus bent down and picked up the valentine James dropped, as it fluttered to the ground.

'Mummy and Daddy, there aren't enough words in the whole dictionary to say how much I love you -Love Harry'

"Simple, to the point, and an obvious crowd pleaser," Remus critiqued. "I'd definitely give it an 'O'."

James looked up and mouthed a silent 'thank you' to the unassuming Remus for bringing their little boy home to them. He shuddered to think what could have happened, and how vulnerable Harry had been alone in the park. He was as much at a loss for words to express his gratitude, as Harry was to express his love. Not only did Remus bring him home, he was the catalyst that finally brought them together as the family they were meant to be.

There's always room for one more in the family, and Harry definitely needed a more loving uncle than Vernon. Who better, than one slightly shabby werewolf with patched robes and shaggy hair?

Signaling to Remus to join the family, they all hugged until they collapsed into a laughing giggling pile on the floor, while Holly cooed contentedly from the comfy couch, happily levitating her new toy, the gaudy glittery valentine.

Everything was perfect.

Their little family was growing.

Remus had found what he had been seeking.

Remus had found his home.

~fin~

A Patchwork Rainbow

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or anything else that may seem familiar. Sometimes I even doubt ownership of my own thoughts.

Author: DracaDelirus

Dedication: For my sister, for all the ideas on how to find luck, and for Doc for allowing me the time to write about it. Also for swanpride, Jack of Trade, tati1 and wolfawaken who are always so encouraging, and to all who wanted a more (haha) 'serious' chapter :)

My Saint Patrick's Day Wish

May your garden weeds be small and few
As blessings be the thing that grew
May your roof shelter you from the rain
Safe and dry 'til the storm does wane

May your day dawn bright with sunny skies
And eve be lit by fireflies
May fortune follow where 'ere you go
With coins as bright as the fair rainbow

May you meet with aid at every turn
No enemy be your concern
May luck be one of your truest friends
And stick with you throughout journeys end

May miracles in your palm you hold
Tiny hands more precious than gold
May many generations to come
Be proud of whom they descended from

May your life's travel's obstacles lack
Sun on your face and wind at your back
May you live long and may you love true
And be content in all you do

- Happy Saint Patrick's Day! -

DracaDelirus

PatchworkRainbowPatchworkRainbowobniaRkrowhctaPwobniaRkrowhctaP

“Ugh! Gerroff me!” Harry’s muffled shouts could be heard coming from underneath the hulking lump that was his cousin Dudley. “One (cough)... two (cough)... three (cough)...” He counted to ten as he spat out the handful of grass Dudley had tried to force down his throat.

Harry had been counting to ten a lot lately and as he did it once more, he thought how ironic it was that no matter how much things changed they still remained the same. He now knew that all the odd things that he did, that his relatives said happened because he was a freak, had really happened because he was a wizard. Of course, in his aunt and uncle’s opinion being a wizard was the same as being a freak, so that didn’t raise his value in their eyes one smidge. It was just too bad his parents didn’t think that it would be a good idea for him to use magic against Dudley. Rats! What good was being a wizard if it didn’t give him an advantage over his cousin?

Dudley was again in the advantageous upper-hand spot, sitting atop his younger and smaller cousin on the school playground, again enjoying the lunch Harry should have been eating, and reveling in the fact that things were finally going his way. All was well in the Kingdom of Dudley! Long live the king! His father had managed to get that freaky teacher fired, the one who was so horribly nice to his freaky little cousin, and who tried to make him look foolish with all that valentine business. Now they had a new substitute teacher who, much to his ultimate satisfaction thought his cousin was just as freaky as he did. Finally! One he didn’t have to train!

The only thing that irked Dudley about the whole matter was that these stupid old teachers didn’t really go away. First Mrs. Krueger and her husband stuck around and even took his freaky cousin to live with them, but then Mr. Wolfe added himself to their ‘family’ as an ‘uncle’! An ‘uncle’ his left foot! He could almost buy the-long-lost-aunt-and-uncle-back-from-the-dead business, but what was Mr. Wolfe trying to pull? Dudley knew darn well that his mum and dad had only had one sister apiece, no brothers, and Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Krueger

didn't look anything alike... heck!... they didn't even have the same last name! Those stupid old teachers! Instead of packing up and leaving, never to darken the doorstep of Dudley Dursley again, they just moved in all around him, and made themselves at home. It was really getting rather annoying.

As the school bell pealed out the signal to return to class, Dudley laboriously hefted himself to his feet, with a knee to Harry's back as he did so, knocking the air out of his cousin's lungs.

"Tell Auntie, thanks for the lunch!" Dudley laughed as he and his friends headed back to class.

'One of these days...' Harry thought murderously, as he lay with his eyes closed on the grass, trying to catch his breath. Yes, one of these days, it would be different, but right now he really ought to feel around and find his glasses he thought idly. But as he had heard Dudley snap them in two, he already knew he would have to tape them back together. He wasn't looking forward to going around the rest of the day looking like the dork Dudley said he was, until he could go home and have his mum fix them again. The only redeeming aspect to the whole embarrassing situation was that at least the weather had warmed and the day was clear, and he was neither in an icy mud puddle, nor on wet tarmac. If he had to be sat on, the new soft grass and was a welcome change of pace, and chewing thoughtfully on the last few blades of grass in his mouth, not all that bad tasting.

Several meters away, a pair of calculating eyes watched the scene from behind a large well placed pyracantha bush. Such a small boy for such a big fuss. It had taken him years of planning, months of travel, weeks of false leads, and countless dead ends to locate his target, but he finally had him within his sight. For the past several days he had done nothing but watch the boy's every move, he hadn't eaten, he hadn't slept, he just watched, waiting for his chance. Surveying the surrounding area, he confirmed that there was no one else to be seen. This was the first time he had found the boy utterly alone, completely unprotected, with no witnesses. He might not get another such perfect opportunity. Stealthily he moved closer. He didn't want to startle his prey and give him time to escape. Now was the time... the boy was totally vulnerable... now was the place... the

boy was totally oblivious... and now... the boy was going to be totally his...

As Harry lay there, drinking in the sweet smelling spring air, and watching the reverse image light patterns that the sun made on the back of his eyelids, he started to get a vague uneasy feeling that he was being watched. Listening carefully, all he could hear was the droning of an early bumblebee looking for an open clover blossom, and two grass snakes in the tall weeds at the edge of the playground, debating in the hissing language of snakes whether or not they had ended their hibernation too soon, as the air still had a slight winter bite to it. They sounded like an old married couple, but nothing seemed amiss in their amiable bickering. Then Harry tensed in fear as something cast a large shadow across his face, as it passed between him and the warm sun. Dudley must have retuned! Harry could have kicked himself for not getting up from his vulnerable position sooner. What was he thinking? Wouldn't he ever learn? Expecting Dudley to start pummeling him at any moment, he started to instinctively curl up into a ball to protect his body, when something extremely heavy landed on his chest preventing the self defense movement.

"Oof!" His eyes flew open wide in alarm as the wind was suddenly knocked out of him again, and his face was drenched with something that felt like sopping wet sand paper. What was this penchant people had with not letting him breathe? Without his glasses on, all he knew was that something huge, black, with foul rotting breath was on top of him obscuring the sun. This wasn't Dudley! His breath was bad, but not this bad! And he had been wearing a blue jumper today. This attacker was wearing black. It must be a Death Eater just as his dad had warned him! He said they wore all black robes! And if they went around eating people, they probably had bad breath too! He had to get away! Mummy! Holly! They were in danger! He had to warn his dad!

Fighting down the panic, he thrashed out at his attacker, and grabbed a hold of two handfuls of long matted fur and tried his best to push his assailant off from him. Wait a minute... fur? Heart racing he tried to hold back the attacker with one hand while he groped around for his glasses with the other. Finally, his fingertips touched an earpiece and

as he settled the half he found on his nose, he closed the other eye and blinked as his assailant came into one-dimensional focus. Sitting on his chest was a very skinny, very black, and VERY mangy dog about the size of a small bear.

A dog!!!! Harry grinned at the mutt in relief, and the mutt grinned back. That is... it was a grin if you counted bared yellowed fangs as a grin. Considering the overly large dog's overly long tail started wagging so hard that the dog fell off him in surprise, Harry decided that YES! The dog was definitely grinning at him. The dog liked him! And he liked the dog! VERY MUCH! If you didn't look close, he wasn't all that mangy, not really... at least nothing that a nice bath and a combing wouldn't help considerably. Harry had always wanted a dog. As far back as he could remember he was always drawing pictures of a big black dog. The two just lay on the grass, the boy on his back with his arms wrapped around the dog, the dog on his chest in what could only be construed as a responding hug, grinning insanely at each other until their mutual admiration society meeting was interrupted by a VERY stern voice:

"MISTER... 'KRUEGER'!"

"OH NO!" Harry sat up straight looking toward the angry voice, the dog rolling off his chest in surprise at the sudden movement. "Am I in trouble now!"

'...Woof!... Where are you going?!... Woof!... Don't you know you're mine now?! Woof! Woof! Woof! Woof! Woof!...'

The black dog looked in the same direction as his boy, and immediately rose to his haunches in a protective attack mode with ears back and tail pointing out behind him, a low growl emitting from his throat, all aimed toward the very tall man dressed all in black looming in the doorway to the school. The enemy! The dog bared his teeth again, only this time there was definitely NOT a grin on his furry face.

"It's okay," Harry said reassuringly to the big black dog as he petted his back, noticing as he did so that his new friend wasn't wearing a collar and tag 'Score!'

“That’s just my teacher. It’s my fault he’s so angry. I’m late for class. Got to go!” Harry grabbed the other half of his glasses, jumped up, and ran to the building, stopping out of breath in front of the disapproving Mr. Nathraichean.

“I’m sorry ... (pant)... I’m late ... (pant)... Sir ... (pant)... but the dog ... (pant)...”

“And just what dog is that Mister... ‘Krueger?’” The teacher said slowly in a low silky voice, enunciating the last name and spitting out as if it left a bad taste in his mouth. “Is it the same one that you are attempting so pitifully to imitate?”

“What...?” Harry said looking behind him to point out the dog, but not seeing him anywhere. “...oh.”

“‘Imitate’: a verb, from the Latin *imitatus*, meaning to follow as an example, to copy, mimic, or impersonate. Even someone such as yourself, an underachiever in the scholastic arena, should have at least a rudimentary knowledge of such an unsophisticated word, particularly as you employ it’s meaning frequently.”

“I know what ‘imitates’ means, if that’s what you said.” Harry said defensively.

“Then why are you wasting my time?”

“Sorry sir.”

“Well?”

“Well what sir?” Harry asked innocently, not really sure why his teacher was still upset. After all, he had apologized... twice... what more did he want?

“Back. To. Class.”

“Oh right!” It was really weird how Mr. Nathraichean could yell without raising his voice even one decibel from his low even monotone. But

taking the cue, Harry turned and ran into the building without another word of protest, but gave the playground one last quick glance over his shoulder as he went, and felt a little pang of disappointment when he saw no sign of the big friendly dog.

Deftly jumping over several of Dudley's friend's outstretched legs, all of whom frequently tried to trip him as a favor to his cousin, he hurried to his place in the next to the last seat in the third row from the windows, sliding into place just as Mr. Nathraichean, who had followed at a much more sedate pace, entered the classroom.

Mr. Nathraichean never failed to make an impressive entrance, and without having to say a word, he immediately commanded their attention with all eyes to the front and all mouths tightly closed. Harry did his best to pay attention but out of the corner of his eye, he could see the edge of the playground, and his heart took a leap as he thought for a second that he saw a dark shape on top of the Jungle Gym. Taking a second longer look... he saw nothing there. If it weren't for the drying dog slobber on his collar, he would have doubted that he saw a dog at all and just attributed it to head-injury-caused-hallucinations courtesy of Dudley and his gang, but he was so sure... and then for a second he thought he saw... but that's silly! How could a dog climb a Jungle Gym?

Harry sat lost in thought for the rest of the afternoon, while he idly tried to tape a bent paperclip to the bridge of his glasses to hold them together, and the teacher droned on and on and on. He wondered if the big black dog would still be nearby when he got out of school, while the teacher droned on and on and on. He wondered what his mum was making for supper. He liked that he actually got to eat supper every night now. He hoped it would be fried chicken. The teacher droned on and on and on. He wondered if the big black dog had a name. The teacher droned on and on and on. In the distance, he could see the sky starting to gray with storm clouds. He wondered if it would be sunny or rainy for the weekend. Last Saturday his dad had taken him to the park. They had lots of fun. His dad pushed him so high in the swings he felt like he was flying, and then they really did go flying! The teacher droned on and on and on. He wondered if the big black dog liked to play fetch. He bet he could throw a ball really far if he had a dog to chase it. The teacher droned on and on

and on sounding much like the bumblebee looking for the clover blossom, until the girl who sat behind him poked him in the back with a sharp pencil. Harry jumped and shook his head out of the daze he was in, finally realizing that the entire class was quiet and turned in their seats staring at him, with Dudley's smirk being particularly smirky, and a mirror image of the expression on the teacher's face.

"Wha'?"

"So eloquent Mister... 'Krueger'. Would you care to elaborate?"

'OH NO! Mr. Nathraichean just asked me something and I wasn't paying attention!' Not paying attention was against Mr. Nathraichean's classroom rule number two... or was it number three? There were so many rules it was hard to keep them straight. Harry gulped and sat up straight. Admitting his mistake, he said bravely, "I'm sorry Mr. Nathraichean. I wasn't paying attention. Could you repeat the question?"

"The question currently under discussion Mister... 'Kruger'..." Mr. Nathraichean started moving slowly towards where Harry was sitting, getting closer with every word, "... is why pray tell, would any sane person want to celebrate someone who was reputed to have, falsely or otherwise, driven away... ssssnakes?" his eyes narrowing to glinty little slits as he hissed the last word just inches from Harry's face.

"I-I d-d-don't know Mr. Nathraichean." Harry stuttered leaning back in his seat, as far away from the angry face as he possibly could go without falling. He didn't know why the teacher hated him as much as he did, but he was getting the definite impression that if it were up to the teacher he would be enrolled in St. Brutus' Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys before the month was up. And while that would delight his Aunt and Uncle no end, he thought it might possibly disappoint his parents.

"You don't know?" Mr. Nathraichean spit out feigning surprise.

"No sir. I like grass snakes..." Harry replied softly, and then added even more softly, "...and dogs."

“You like snakes? Then you should know that the common grass snake is more properly referred to as ‘Natrix Natrix’. And as that may be the only intelligent contribution you make to the class all term, I believe I shan’t ask you anything else...” as Harry made an audible sigh of relief the teacher added, “...for the time being,” crushing his short lived hopes.

“Now class, the concept that I have been trying to drive into your miniscule cerebrums is not that difficult to comprehend, so I fail to see why even your infinitesimal intellects have failed to grasp it. There is no such thing as... ‘luck’... and therefore no reason what-so-ever to dwell on observances of such absurd legends, superstitions, and folderol. I want no further idle chatter of providence, chance, or serendipitous happenstance in my classroom. Now, if someone has an intelligent question I would be more than happy to address it.”

“Mr. Nathraichean?” Piers bravely raised his hand at the prodding of Dennis and Malcolm.

“Yes, Mister Polkiss?” Mr. Nathraichean asked trying to plaster on his face what he thought would be construed as a small patient smile, but instead it gave him the appearance of having indigestion.

“We was wondering, since it’s already the ninth of March and you haven’t told us yet, what are we going to do for Arts and Crafts this month?”

“And what did I tell you my first day of class Mister Polkiss?”

“There will be no foolish Arts and Crafts making in your class.” Piers parroted.

“And what else?”

“Um... that we’re a bunch of dunderheads?”

“Precisely Mister Polkiss. Bravo, you have succeeded in answering your own question.” The teacher started to turn his back to the class to start writing math equations on the board, only to stop when he saw Dudley madly waving his hand in the air for attention.

“Yes, Mister Dursley? You have an intelligent question?”

“Yeah... so if we aren't going to do a foolish Arts and Crafts project what kind of Arts and Crafts project are we going to do?” Dudley asked perplexed. He was especially glad they weren't going to do something stupid again, like valentines or ornaments. In his opinion all Arts and Crafts were foolish and a waste of time. He just hoped whatever this teacher had in mind, that it didn't involve a lot of work and creativity.

Mr. Nathraichean heaved a heavy sigh. Nine-year-olds! Gods he felt old. What one track minds! It made first years all look like genius's in comparison. Whatever made him agree to this? Come to think of it, he really didn't remember ever actually agreeing...

“As this conversation is becoming inanely redundant, I shall counter with a pertinent inquiry of my own... by what reasoning were you brought to the conclusion that you and your classmates have done anything remotely deserving of the reward of an Arts and Crafts project? Hm? Mister Dursley? Do you have an answer?”

Dudley scowled. Was the teacher making fun of him? That wasn't right. He was supposed to make fun of Harry, not him. And of course, they were going to have an Arts and Crafts project! They always had to have an Arts and Crafts project! It was required in Primary school... wasn't it? It must be! There was even a whole section of the room dedicated just to Arts and Crafts! “Because we haf' to have one. That's why.”

“We haf' to have one. That's why.” The teacher parroted back in a slow deliberate monotone.

‘Now I'm sinking to their level. If I'm here much longer I'll have green jell-o for brains.’

“Er... Mr. Nathraichean?” a quiet voice from the back of the room caught his attention.

“Yes, Mister... ‘Krueger’? You have something of value to add to this dialogue?”

“I... um... er... I think Dudley is right Sir... I think we have to have Arts and Crafts.” Harry said backing up his cousin. He wasn’t fond of Dudley, but when he was right, he was right. And even though this new teacher was quite unpleasant, Harry didn’t want him to get into trouble with Principal Speer just because he didn’t know what he was supposed to be teaching. That wasn’t fair, he was just a substitute teacher like his Mum and Uncle Remmy had been, maybe he needed the job too like they had. Maybe he didn’t have any money for food either and he was hungry. Maybe that was why he was so grouchy all the time.

“Oh really?” the teacher sneered as twenty-two heads nodded affirmatively.

“Yeah!” Dudley said proudly at being recognized in front of the entire class for being right.

“As you wish then... what do you suggest we do for this... project... Mister Dursley?” he asked, surprising the blonde boy by turning back to him instead of beleaguering his cousin.

Dudley didn’t care what the project was, as long as it was something easy. They used to just have to color within the lines to get a gold star, and gold stars made his mum happy so she bought him toys, so maybe something like that. But he didn’t want to be the one to suggest such a babyish activity in front of his friends, so he finally just shrugged and replied, “I dunno.”

“I dunno. I dunno.” Mr. Nathraichean mocked. “It appears as though we are at a veritable quandary: you all insist on an... Arts and Crafts... project,” he said with a visible shudder “...and I refuse to squander my time with triviality. Therefore, if we must do one, it will be something instructive. Now for a focus... since Mister Dursley declined to provide one, and the class has voiced an abhorrent enthrallment with the approaching Saint’s Day that our friends from across the pond are so terribly fond of, we shall center the project on Saint Patrick’s Day. Given that Saint Patrick’s reputed notoriety was

of a biological nature, our emphasis will be on the flora and fauna indigenous to this... charming... locale.”

As twenty-one befuddled but happy faces beamed back at him, Mr. Nathraichean had the sudden suspicion he had fallen into an evil munchkin trap. Children in his classes did not... beam. In fact, he was sure he had a rule against it. If he didn't have one he should, it was nauseating.

His first impulse was to blame Mister Dursley as he was the one who had brought the topic back up, only the look of utter dismay on Dudley's face at the prospect of another holiday centric project dispelled the conclusion that he was the ringleader. No... so if it wasn't Mister Dursley who was the cause of this pending fiasco, whom could he blame? AH HA! Mister... 'Krueger'...! He was the one that backed up the blonde boy, and he was the one that looked the 'happiest' at the mention of a project. He should have known Mister... 'Krueger'... was at the bottom of it. Well if he must lead an Arts and Crafts project, he must. He had been hoping to avoid it if he ignored it, even though admittedly, the Principal did say something on his first day about it being a required activity, but he would NOT allow Mister... 'Krueger'... to have any fun with it. No indeed, he would not. Mr. Nathraichean's black obsidian eyes bore holes through the object of his irritation. Not at all.

As the bell rang to dismiss class for the week, Mr. Nathraichean called out, “I expect a one foot essay from each of you first thing Monday morning on the topic of the fallacies of St. Patrick's Day.” At the incredulous looks and groans from the class, he added with a certain satisfaction, “Remember, having an Arts and Crafts project was NOT my idea. You may thank your very own Mister... 'Krueger'... for the assignment.”

On the way home, Harry dragged his feet, the total hostility of his classmates at the lack of a project that included glitter and glue, drove all thoughts of looking for the dog out of his mind. Thanks to his cousin he hadn't ever been popular with the other kids, but now they positively hated him. Essay homework on the weekend! It wasn't fair. He hadn't suggested weekend homework, especially not an essay! But from the looks he had gotten on the way out of class, they still

blamed him. He was surprised that they hadn't all ganged together to beat him up. In fact, he was surprised that Dudley and his gang hadn't chased him down yet. Thinking about that eventuality Harry picked up his pace and was soon running for the safety of home. Just as he neared the building, he could hear the pounding of heavy feet behind him, so he sprinted the last few meters down the pavement, up the stoop, and through the door of the ground floor flat, just as his Mum opened it to welcome him home.

"Glasses broken again?" Lily asked as she shut the door behind him, while bouncing the drooling baby Holly on her hip.

"Dudley again." Harry nodded.

"Tsk! Tsk! That boy..." Lily said as she mended them with a wave of her wand, "...you know he almost caught up with you this time. Maybe you ought to let him catch you just once and see what happens, it might really surprise him. Bullies are usually more bark than bite."

"Not Dudley! I know what will happen if he catches me!" Harry said vehemently shaking his head.

"You do?"

"Yeah he'll beat me up, and my glasses aren't the only thing he'll break. I know. He used to catch me a lot..." Harry started, and then at the sad look on his Mum's face he added, "...but he doesn't anymore... thanks to you."

"Thanks to me? Why? What have I done? I can't seem to make the blackmailing little bully behave, any more than Petunia does. And I had such hopes for him..." Lily said shaking her head and going into the kitchen and putting Holly in her carrier with a pacifier.

"Because with all the nice lunches you make for me it's easier to outrun him now!" Harry said looking on the bright side as he sat down at the kitchen table.

“You mean he lets you eat your lunch now, so you have the energy to run faster?” Lily asked hopefully as she placed a large glass of cold milk and a plate of fresh warm tarts before him.

“...er... not so much... really... but... the more he eats the slower he runs so it works out the same. Anyway, like you say, it’s the thought that counts... right?” Harry said taking a big bite of the warm gooey tart with clotted cream, and sighed with happiness. Treacle was his favorite.

“Hrumph! As you say, not so much... at least not for growing boy. I need to think of something... I shouldn’t put a spell on Dudley, him being a muggle and all. And I can’t put a ‘don’t-eat-me-spell’ on your lunch or you wouldn’t eat it either... hm...” Lily wrinkled her brow at the puzzle.

“Mummy?” Harry asked very timidly, “Maybe I know a way...”

‘Mummy! There it was again! How she loved hearing him say that word! It wasn’t very often, but when he did call her Mummy he could get just about anything in the world he asked for...’

“....could I.... couldIhaveadog?” he started out timidly, but then finished in a rush of words before he lost his nerve, “He-he could chase Dudley away while I eat my lunch...”

‘...well anything but that.’

“Oh sweetie... I would love to say ‘yes’, and eventually your Dad and I will get you a pet, but not a dog... maybe a nice kneazle or an owl. Magical children typically receive a pet when they turn eleven, to take with them when they go away to school, only we call them familiars. And you’ll be ten this summer... I tell you what, when we go back to the wizarding world, that will be one of the first things on our shopping list. How does that sound?”

“But not... not a dog?”

"No honey... not a dog. We don't really have room for a dog. Besides, dog's are muggle pets, they're not magical and can't go to Hogwarts with you... maybe you'd like a fat toad or a cat?"

"Not really..." Harry said sadly losing his appetite and pushing away the plate of tarts. "...I always wanted a dog, but Aunt Petunia said they were too much of a nuisance and said I couldn't be trusted to take proper care of it."

Lily just couldn't bear to be the one to break her little boy's heart, not so soon after getting it back, so she took the easy way out... "Well.... you can ask your dad when he gets home. We'll leave it up to him."

"Really?!" Harry said excitedly perking back up immediately.

"Really." Feeling quite guilty at the predicament into which she had just put James, she added quickly, "But whatever he says goes. So if he says no... and I warn you, he probably will, you have to promise me you won't be upset at him. Okay?"

"I promise!" Harry said happily and he started munching on his tarts again and began thinking up a good name for his large black furry friend.

'Maybe 'Missy' or 'Betsy' or... no it should be a flower name like 'Lily' and 'Holly'... maybe 'Daisy' would work. Hm...' he frowned. '...maybe it's a boy dog. If it's a boy dog, 'Daisy' won't work... what's a boy-sounding flower... I know! If it's a boy dog, I'll name him 'Cosmos'! That's a great name for a dog! YAY! It's all settled... 'Daisy' if it's a girl dog and 'Cosmos' if it's a boy dog. Now since Mummy said 'yes', all I need is for Daddy to say 'yes' too and I'll have a dog of my very own!

"Did Dudley at least walk part way home with you today like he promised me he would, or did he chase you the whole way again?"

"Nah, he forgot until I was almost home. Then he tried to catch me, but I was too fast."

"I really don't like you walking home by yourself Harry..." Lily said biting her lip to stifle a yawn, "...sorry... if it weren't for being up all night with Holly, I would be there to walk you home. You know that, don't you? New babies are just so tiring the first few months, and having one at the age of thirty is a lot different than when I was twenty and had you."

"I know. And it's okay. I'm being really careful just like daddy said. Hey! Maybe I could take Holly to the park in her pram and you could take a nap?"

"Oh no you don't, young man! You can play with her right here. We'll spread out the blanket and it can be just like the park." At the disappointed look on his face she added, "I know it's hard, being cooped up all day when it is so nice out, and I know you want to get out and run, but you heard what your father said. It isn't safe out there right now until we figure out what's going on in our world. So unless you are in school, or you have someone with you, you are to be here where I can watch you. The next time Dudley 'forgets' to walk with you, you remind him. Or you wait in the school building with your teacher until your father can get you. Dudley may not be much protection, but it's not far and he's frightening enough to scare away any adult with any sense at all. So no walking home alone, promise me."

"But if I had a dog..." Harry started to protest but trailed off at a shake of his mum's head. "...yes'm... I promise."

"Now tell me what you did in school today. Are you starting to like the new teacher?"

"Not really but then he doesn't like me. I don't know why, and the way he says my name... it's like he doesn't believe it."

"What do you mean?"

"He says it like...Mister... 'Krueger'..." Harry said doing a fair imitation of the loathing he heard every time Mr. Nathraichean said his name. "I wish Uncle Remmy was still teaching us, he was fun." He said with longing.

“Ooo... I see. Well, I do too, Uncle Remmy is a great teacher and we could use the money, but I’m sure your new teacher is good too or they wouldn’t have hired him. What is he having you do for Arts and Crafts? That’s always the telling sign of a good Primary School teacher.”

“We have to write an essay on Saint Patrick’s Day.” Harry sighed.

“An essay? For Arts and Crafts?”

“Yes. Mr. Nathraichean says if we haf’ to do Arts and Crafts then it’s got’s to be ‘instructive’ so’s he doesn’t squander his time.”

“Well I guess purely academic is one approach.” she said doubtfully.

“One approach for what?” James asked coming in with Remus and planting kisses on the tops of his wife and progeny’s heads, gathering a kiss back from Lily in the process and giggles from the kids.

“...one approach to Arts and Crafts in a Primary School class. Harry’s new teacher is having them write essays on St. Patrick’s Day instead of actually crafting something.” Lily said disapprovingly.

“It seems to me you made Harry do the same thing about Christmas.” James teased.

Puzzled, Remus looked from one to the other. Taking in Lily’s embarrassed flush, James’ smugness, he finally asked, “Okay what’d I miss?”

“Nothing.” James and Lily answered in unison. Then Harry added softly, “I don’t mind anymore. Besides... if you hadn’t punished me, my Angel might not have found you and Daddy for me. And... and I’m glad she did, so I am glad you did too.”

“Oh Harry! I’m glad too.” Lily said gathering her little boy up in her arms and carrying him sniffing into the living room, while James told Remus their Christmas story, and of what they had found out of

Harry's life before they found and rescued him, and of the very close call they had had finding him in time.

Remus soon joined them in the living room, along with James who was carrying Holly football style under one arm, and the two men sat down on the comfy couch on either side of Lily, who was still holding a very cuddly and slightly tearful Harry.

"I'm so sorry Harry." Remus took a deep breath and apologized.

"... 'bout what Uncle Remmy?" Harry asked softly.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me. I'm sorry you had to live through that. And I'm sorry you were lost for eight years."

"But it wasn't your fault! Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia knew exactly where I was. And they made sure I stayed there by locking me in the cupboard. I wasn't losted at all!" Harry protested.

"But you were lost from the ones who really loved you, your Mummy and Daddy, and that- that was my fault."

"Your fault? I don't understand..."

"Yes, my fault. You see on that horrible night when the evil wizard attacked your Mum and Dad, your godfather Sirius came to me and told me that he had saved them and that you had been killed. But your father thinks that in-between Sirius rescuing him on the ground floor, and when he went back in to search for you and your mother on the first floor, that someone else rescued you. And I think I know who that was, and I think that person tried to tell me you were safe, and I blew it and didn't listen. If I just hadn't been so angry, I would have known all those years ago that you were alive and maybe I could have done something. All these years I have been upset with Sirius for not listening and letting his anger get the better of him, and as it turns out I did the same thing."

"Who were you angry at? Was it me?" Harry asked quietly, fingering the buttons on his mother's blouse, his head still nestled cozily under her chin as she rocked him gently and rubbed his back.

“No! Never at you Harry! I was angry with a man named Albus Dumbledore. He’s a powerful wizard, and it was his plan we were following to keep you and your parents safe. When it failed, I blamed him. He sent me a message that night saying he had wonderful news and needed to see me right away. But I burned the rest of the message without reading it and sent the ashes back to him. All I can think now is that he must have been the one that found you and saved you from the rubble. He must have sent me the note so I would know you were all right. I think he was the one that left you with your Aunt and Uncle. If only I hadn’t burned the note...”

“Then why did you burn it? Didn’t – didn’t you want me?”

“Of course I did Harry! I love you! If they’d had let me raise you, I would have taken you for my own child in a heartbeat. I burned the note, because at the time, I thought Dumbledore was just celebrating that the evil wizard had been killed, and I was grieving over the price that had been paid to make that happen. Since I thought that the price was your life, I couldn’t imagine celebrating it, and couldn’t forgive Dumbledore for wanting to do so. But even if I had responded to his note, they wouldn’t have let me have you because I’m a...”

“You mean because of your ‘furry little problem’?” Harry asked locking eyes with Remus, and using the term his Dad had used to describe Remus’ lycanthrope.

“Yes,” Remus said bitterly, “The ministry, in their great wisdom, doesn’t feel I’m ‘safe’ to be around children.”

“They’re wrong.” Harry said with conviction. “..and... I... I love you too.”

“Thank you Harry. And please believe me when I say that even though the Ministry wouldn’t have let me raise you myself, I would have found a way to be part of your life. And while I was searching for your parents, I would have found a way to have made sure that your relatives didn’t neglect you as they did.”

"I believe you." Harry said flinging his arms around his favorite uncle's neck and giving him a hug.

"Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?" Remus sobbed hugging the child back.

"Well..." Harry paused and then had a brilliant idea and whispered in his uncle's ear.

"If you keep this up you are destined for Slytherin, you know that don't you Prongslet?"

"No Uncle Remmy, you said that wrong... remember? I'm the 'Princelet'." Harry said proudly.

"Pshaw... Prongslet... Princelet... the way you are going, it all spells out S.N.A.K.E." Remus laughed.

"But will you ask for me? Huh? Will you? I really really really really REALLY need one! Pleaaasssee?" Harry begged hopefully, fairly bouncing up and down by this time.

"Um... I think I left something in the oven..." Lily said beating a hasty retreat upon seeing the look on her son's face and knowing quite well, what he wanted Remus to ask and to whom.

"Ah... sorry young one, but that is a 'no'. Unfortunately, that is one question that is strictly between father and son. As a good uncle, and one who does not want to be hexed by your father again, I think it is about time I bow out of this family scene. Besides, I need to go downstairs and start preparing my humble abode. I have some new locks to install. The ones from last month are rather bent."

"Chicken." Lily called from the kitchen.

"It takes one to know one my dear." Remus retorted.

"Well, that too, but I meant we're having chicken for supper and you're welcome to come back up."

“Thanks, I will.” Remus said giving her a grateful smile before making a quick exit of his own and closing the door firmly behind him, leaving a clueless father and a conniving son staring at each from opposite ends of the comfy couch, with Holly limberly gumming her toes between them listening interestedly to the conversation. Whatever it was her big bother wanted, she wanted it too.

“So... Harry...” James started not sure after Lily and Remus’ reactions that he wanted to find out what it was his son really really really really REALLY needed. Not sure at all. “...um... how was your day? In school that is?” he finished lamely.

“Oh... it was all right... I guess...” Harry said a little dejected that his would-be-supporters had all deserted him so easily. Didn’t they both say they wouldn’t ever leave him again? But maybe that promise was just for boy’s who didn’t want a dog...

“That’s good.” James said relieved and promptly flipped open his paper and tried to bury his nose in it, and ignore the woe-be-me look from the other end of the couch. ‘Nope, not going there. Probably wants to borrow my broom. Take him for a ride on it once and he thinks he owns the thing. Or my wand... maybe he wants to use my wand. Probably wants to turn Dudley into a toaster. Well maybe I’ll say ‘yes’ to that. Probably shouldn’t though... Lily wouldn’t like it.’

“Er...?”

‘Here it comes, brace yourself old man. Remember, whatever it is just be firm...’

At a giggle from Lily in the kitchen at his predicament, he scowled at her through the paper. Obviously, she knew what Harry’s question was going to be, and she hadn’t wanted to say ‘no’ to it herself, so she made him out to be the heavy. She may be two months his senior but he’d show her he could handle it! He’s show her he was resolute enough to stand up to a nine-year-old. He could be the responsible parent! He could! He was all grown up now! Gods! He was almost thirty years old himself! He had three decades of experience behind him. He not only could do it, he would do it!

'...so practice it James.... the answer is NO, N.O. 'No'. Not a hard word, very simple word indeed... no no no no no. I heard it a lot myself growing up. Nothing wrong with it. Use it all the time, perfectly good word.'

"Yes Son?"

"Can I... can I have a... a puppy?" Harry asked shyly, he thought maybe if he said 'puppy' and not 'dog' it wouldn't sound nearly as BIG as it had to his mum. His mum had said that they didn't have room for a 'dog', but maybe they would for a 'puppy'. The big black dog he had in mind didn't really look like a puppy, but it certainly acted like one. And since he didn't know how old it was... maybe it was just a VERY BIG puppy? Like Dudley had been a VERY BIG baby? Well... it could happen...

'...a puppy!...' Holly cooed happily and waved her hands with delight. She had no idea what a puppy was but if Harry wanted one, then that was good enough for her!

"...a-a-a- a 'puppy'? Did you ask your mother?" James said his voice cracking with surprise. THAT was NOT even remotely anything like what he thought Harry would ask him for, and he wasn't a bit prepared for it.

"Er... yes?"

"And what did she say?"

"To ask you..."

"Oh she did, did she? Did she say anything else?" he asked, his eyes narrowing and shooting daggers towards the blithe red-head humming gaily in the kitchen.

Harry sighed and reluctantly repeated the rest about 'maybe' when they went back to the wizarding world and then 'maybe' a cat or an owl or a toad, but not a dog.

“Well I always agree with your mother...” James said loudly over the derisive snort from the kitchen, “...so the answer to a dog is ‘no’, for all the reasons she said. But we can certainly look into a nice pygmy puff when we go back.”

This was going nowhere fast. Didn’t they understand? He didn’t need a pet when he got back to the wizarding world, and he certainly didn’t need a pygmy puff, whatever that was, what he needed was a DOG, a BIG BLACK DOG, and he needed one NOW!

“But... Daddy...I...”

‘HA! Remus was right... trying to play the ‘Daddy’ card. Maybe he will be a Slytherin. Well it won’t work with this Gryffindor.’

“No buts Son, your mum is right, we just don’t have room for a dog right now.”

“Okay fine.” Harry pouted and slid off the couch and headed towards his room.

“Where are you going Harry? It’s about time for supper.” Lily called out.

“Not hungry, going to do my homework.” He mumbled shutting the bedroom door behind him.

“I’m sorry James,” Lily said contritely as she went to sit by her huffy husband. “...but I just couldn’t look into those big sad green eyes and say ‘no’ to the first thing he really ever asked me for. I just couldn’t.”

“So you made me?”

“But you did it so well...” she wheedled.

“Can’t butter me up woman. You owe me big time for this one. Now fetch me my supper.” James ordered.

“It’s only because I agree that I ‘owe you big time’ that your supper isn’t dumped all over you right now at that order sir!”

Closing the door behind him, so he didn't have to hear his parents talking any more about why he couldn't have a dog, Harry sighed dejectedly. After also closing the window, he went over and flopped on his bed.

Not in the mood to work on his essay he fisted his pillow and curled up in a ball on his bed. He should have figured. Once when he was much younger, he had asked his Aunt and Uncle if he could have a puppy for his birthday. His uncle declared it was a good idea and that every boy needed a pup, so the Dursleys had promptly went out to Aunt Marge's and got a bulldog puppy, but they didn't give it to him. They gave it to Dudley instead. After one week of Dudley forgetting to feed, water, and exercise the pup, it chewed through its rope and ran away. Aunt Petunia said it proved that Harry couldn't be trusted to take care of a dog. But that wasn't fair! Dudley hadn't even let him even get near enough to it to pet it! How was he supposed to take care of it?

As Harry fell into a fitful sleep, shivering in a sudden draft, he was unaware when a pair of shrewd eyes arrived in the deep shadows of the alley and started appraising him from outside the window. Such a small boy, and such flimsy defenses, the shadowy figure scoffed shaking his head. As if a mere pane of glass would keep away the evils without. Foolish muggles! They didn't even bother to close it he noted as the curtains fluttered in the slight breeze. They might as well have sent out engraved invitations saying 'here he is, come and get him.' A whispered incantation and the window slid silently shut just as a flash of lightning faded and plunged both the alley, and the observer, once again into the anonymity of darkness. Another flash revealed only an empty alley remained.

A half hour later Lily poked her head in the door and signaled to James to be quiet as she carried Holly into her crib, "... he's already asleep."

Moving over to his bed, she pulled the cover over him and noticed the tracks of tears drying on his cheeks. "He's been crying. And he never did come back for supper. I guess he was more upset about not getting a dog that we thought."

“He did say he really needed one times five. That’s a pretty big need for a small boy.” James said thoughtfully as slid the windowpane closed. “...maybe we ought to...”

“No, we already discussed this. We need to be the parents here. We’ll let him have his pick when we get back... but right now? A dog? You’ve got to be kidding. Where would we put it? Sure, we have the larger flat now, but it isn’t as if we have a house with a garden. Dogs need a lot of room.”

“I know that’s all reasonable and responsible... but I- I just want to make up for everything he didn’t have... ” James said putting on his best puppy-dog-eyes face, “Maybe when we go back we could get him a puppy? A small one?”

“You’re as bad as your son,” Lily laughed.

“Does that mean yes?”

“It means maybe.”

“Tease!” James said capturing her lips in a kiss before she could change it back to a firm ‘no’.

...(thump)...

“I wish they’d get over it!” James growled at the ceiling, referring to his in-laws now ensconced in the flat above them. “They’re going to wake the kids.”

“It’s not likely they ever will get over it, not in our lifetimes anyhow, no matter how many of them we have. But I’ll talk with Petunia again tomorrow.” Lily sighed as they turned out the light and left the room.

... (thump)... (thump)...

‘...there’s nothing under the bed... ’

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...

‘...nothing but us dust bunnies...’

... (thump)... (thump)...

‘...hungry dust bunnies...’

... (thump)...

When Harry turned over in his sleep, one foot slipped out from under the covers, leaving his toes dangling irresistibly delicious over the edge.

... (lick!)...

“DADDY!” Harry screamed bloody murder as he jumped up and ran out of the room.

“Merlin! What’s wrong?” James asked whipping out his wand at the cry.

“Help me Daddy! There’s something under my bed and it tried to eat my toes!” Harry said flinging his arms around James’ leg for dear life.

James edged into the room with Harry still clinging to him for protection, and peered under the bed. “There’s nothing here son.” Then as a boom of thunder rolled in the open window, James said knowingly, “It was probably just the storm that frightened you. I’ll close the window.” Then tucking Harry back into bed, he sat on the edge and brushed the hair away from his son’s face, and kissed his forehead.

‘Too bad that all monsters can’t be banished as easily,’ he thought as he sat by his son’s bedside until he drifted back off to sleep.

Saturday morning dawned as gray and damp as Remus Lupin felt. March tenth, hip-hip-hooray... he thought derisively... yay me. It was his birthday, the big three-oh and the day before the full moon. How more fortunate could he get? With any luck, no one would remember

the first, and if he drank enough, maybe he wouldn't remember the later.

Sighing he got up and took one of his few remaining doses of wolfsbane out of his trunk. Downing half of it with a shudder of revulsion, he noticed that he could count the remaining vials on one hand. He'd soon have to seek out Severus Snape. He couldn't put it off past this moon's cycle. He didn't have enough for another month. He had just gotten so caught up with James and his family that he had completely forgotten. As soon as he recovered from this month's transformation, he'd have to head for London. Someone in Diagon Alley must know where Severus could be found now. Eight years ago, he had heard rumblings that Dumbledore had hired him to teach at Hogwarts, but with his brains, Severus was undoubtedly a rich Master of Potions by now, with many patents to his credit. He probably had a swanky villa somewhere. It was always the quiet bookish types that ended up the richest. Severus was probably no exception.

Strange how, just like the cycle of the moon, everything in his life always seemed to come full circle. In his werewolf form, he had almost killed Severus during their Hogwarts years, and now Severus was the only wizard he trusted to brew the wolfsbane potion that allowed him to hold onto what little control he had on his life. He only hoped that Severus would take pity on him and his empty pocket book, as he didn't have anything left after James' latest scheme. He loved James and Lily as a brother and sister, and he would do anything for their kids, but sometimes James forgot that not everyone had vaults full of gold at their disposal.

No, that wasn't fair. James had done remarkably well living as a muggle considering he had no muggle skills of which to boast. Sure, he wasn't flush with cash but he was providing a living of sorts. His family hadn't starved, and they did have a roof over their heads. And they had extended that roof to include him.

No, Remus didn't begrudge loaning James the money, it was for a good cause, and he knew he would eventually be good for it. It was even a little ironic that for a change, he had actually had more funds than his friend had. And if he were to be totally honest with himself, he had gotten a kick out of offering it when James hadn't even asked.

He couldn't be blamed for accepting it now, especially when he had been so desperate to pay off Vernon. It was just too bad it hadn't worked. Now they were both broke, neither he nor Lily were teaching, and James was working double shifts everyday to make up for it.

What they needed was cash and lots of it. Remus stretched out on his bed and racked his brain. There had to be a way, there just had to, all they needed was some luck...

While Remus was deep in thought, one floor up James was having identical ones.

"All I need is some luck..." James said shoving his feet into his boots and then looking around for his jacket.

"Luck?" Harry asked scrambling to retrieve the garment, the sleeve of which he could see peeking out from behind the chair where his dad had tossed it the night before.

"Yeah son, I need some luck and lots and lots of it. How 'bout you being my lucky charm?" James asked swinging him up in his arms and giving him a big hug and being rewarded by a brilliant smile in return.

"How can I be a charm?" Harry asked in all seriousness thinking about the charm bracelet that his dad had gotten his mum for her birthday at the end of January. It had four little silver charms on it, his dad had picked out a lily, a stag, and a leaf of holly leaf, and he had picked the fourth, a small lightning bolt. But they were all very small, and he was quite big in comparison. "Do you have to shrink me?"

"No, I think you are just the right size. But let me check..." James said all of a sudden swinging him upside down, so his arms dangled. "Oof! You're getting heavy, but you're just the right size to reach all the way to the floor." He said lowering a giggling Harry the rest of the way down. "I'm sorry about the park this weekend, I really wanted to take you again, but I have a shift at the grocery both today and tomorrow, double weekend pay. Couldn't turn it down."

"That's okay, maybe Uncle Remmy will want to play with me."

“Um... I don't think Uncle Remmy is feeling all that well right now. Too many pies again.”

“Oh...” Harry said with understanding, he was disappointed but he understood what that meant now. It was his parent's way of saying Uncle Remmy was ill and had to be by himself. “But what about cake? If he's ill from too much pie... can he have cake?”

“Cake?”

“Yes! Mummy said it's his birthday and I'm going to help her bake him a chocolate cake for a surprise!”

“I'm sure he'll be there. Nobody can resist your mum's chocolate cake.”

“YAY!” Harry shouted jumping up and down as his mum came in and handed James his lunch.

“Sorry, bologna again.”

“Bologna? I was thinking chicken...” James pouted.

“Then you should have thought about that before you raided the icebox last night.”

“Wasn't me!” James protested his innocence.

“Wasn't me!” Harry echoed. He never raided the icebox, no matter how hungry he got, he only did that one time but Uncle Vernon caught him, and made sure that he never thought of doing it again.

“I suppose you expect me to believe it was Holly?”

‘...wasn't me either! I like mashed bananas... I think it was the dust bunny... he was funny...’ Holly gurgled and drooled, and kicked her feet.

"Maybe Remus got hungry and didn't want to wake us." Lily said doubtfully.

"That's probably it." James agreed, giving out kisses and hugs as he left for work. "I tell you what, seeing as it's Moony's birthday today, I try to pick up something from the meat department, they hold the day before leftovers for the employees and sell it to us cheap. If I hurry, and if I'm lucky..." he added ruffling Harry's hair, "...maybe I'll get first pick and they'll have some steaks, Moony likes his rare." James called as he went out the front door.

"Don't forget... supper is early tonight!" Lily called after him, and got a faint "Righty-o" back.

"Well, it looks like it's just you and me and Holly today." Lily smiled at Harry, "How about we bake that cake?"

"Can I make it myself?" Harry asked eagerly. "I really am good at cooking."

"Well... okay, as long as you let me help."

Several hours later the kitchen looked much like a white dust storm had blown through as every surface was covered with flour, including the little pastry chef, but on the kitchen table stood a magnificent triple layer chocolate cake with fluffy white butter-cream frosting and 'Happy Birthday Uncle Remmy' written carefully across it with blue icing.

"I thought you said you were good at cooking." Lily laughed surveying the mess.

"I am..." Harry grinned licking the last speck of frosting out of the bowl. "...just not so good at cleaning up. I guess that's why Aunt Petunia had me practice that a lot."

"That settles it, I'll clean up. You go play." Lily shooed him away to play with Holly in the living room, while she made the kitchen sparkling clean with a few well placed spells and thought dark uncharitable thoughts about her sister Petunia.

After making Harry some lunch, she fed Holly and put her down for her nap. Then she steeled herself, it was time to talk with her sister again. She had promised James she would.

“Harry sweetie?”

“Yes’m?” he replied looking up from the birthday card he was coloring for his Uncle Remmy.

“Why don’t you go in your room and work on that essay you mentioned? I need to talk with your Aunt Petunia in private and I’m going to have her come down for tea.”

“Okay mummy.” Harry said agreeably and trotted into his room leaving a very happily glowing ‘mummy’ behind.

“That’s funny, I don’t remember leaving the window open. No wonder it’s so cold in here.” Harry said shivering slightly as he pushed down the pane and then sat down at the little desk in front of it. Pulling out a piece of paper and a pencil, he stared at it for a while before drawing a doodle of a dog on all four corners. Then he crumpled it up, tossed it behind him, and got out a new fresh sheet.

“I better get started for real...” After thinking for a few minutes, he wrote ‘Saint Patrick’s Day by Harry James Potter’ on the top... then erased the last part and re-wrote it as ‘by Harry Krueger’ instead. No wonder his new teacher didn’t believe his last name if he didn’t even believe it himself. He would have to be more careful!

After several diligent hours of more doodles, half-hearted essay attempts, and changing Holly every once in a while when she started to fuss, Harry decided that he really didn’t know anything about Saint Patrick. He supposed he should have been paying attention to the teacher, but that low monotone voice when Mr. Nathraichean lectured, just made his mind zone out. And after what his mum said about staying in, he knew a trip to the library would be out of the question. No point in even asking, after all if they wouldn’t say yes to a little thing like a dog, there was no way they would say yes to him having something as big as an entire library to himself. Stabbing a pencil

through his latest doodle of a big black bat he sighed and gave up, tossing it over his shoulder to add to the growing hill of rejects.

At this rate, it would take him all weekend. Maybe his mum or dad, or Uncle Remmy, would know what he could write. With the door closed, he couldn't really hear the words of the conversations in the living room, but he could tell when voices came and went. And he had heard his Aunt's high pitched voice come and go, and he heard when his Uncle Remmy's hoarse voice replaced it, joined soon after by the voice of his returning father. He could already smell the supper cooking and knew it would be ready soon.

Getting up he kicked the crumpled papers out of his path, and got Holly out of her crib, where she had been happily entertaining herself by chewing on her toes. After making sure she wasn't wet again, he carried her in to join the adults for the birthday supper, past the papers littering the rug. Now that he had a room of his own for the first time in his life, he wanted to make sure that they didn't take it away again, so he was doing his best to keep it tidy like his mum had asked him to. He made a mental note to pick up the mess before he went to bed. But right now, the irresistible aroma of the sizzling steaks was making his tummy growl.

Unsure of his welcome, as he had never been allowed to have steak before when the Dursley's had had it, he greeted the adults shyly as he sat down at the kitchen table where they had gathered for supper. He tried not to act surprised when he found to his delight that he not only got to have a steak, instead of just hamburger, he got to have one all to himself! Not that he could possibly eat that much, but he was certainly going to give it his best try.

After supper, he carefully carried the large cake, bedecked with candles, to the table and placed it before Remus. Remus then spent several minutes trying to blow them out unsuccessfully, and getting quite red in the face trying to undo the spell that was causing them to stay lit, until a laughing James admitted that they weren't spelled at all and that he had found trick muggle candles that kept relighting themselves. After replacing them with a real candle, Remus said he was too old and tired, now that he was an ancient thirty, to try again so he bequeathed his candle and its wish to Harry, whom he had

noticed looking longingly at it. At the instant happiness on the little boy's face, and his innocent admission that he had never had a birthday candle to blow out before, he was glad he had.

James gave Remus a silver flask that had found and polished up, to carry his wolfsbane potion in, saying while it wouldn't taste any better at least it would look better. And Lily gave him a warm jumper of soft blue grey wool, to match his eyes that she had knitted herself. Harry shyly offered him the birthday card he had made himself. It had a drawing on the cover of boy with black hair hugging a large grey wolf, and inside it simply said –

'Happy Birthday Uncle Remmy. I'm glad you're my uncle now, you're much better than the last one. I love you - Harry.'

As Remus teared up, Harry threw his arms around his neck and gave him a heartfelt hug. And in that moment, Remus felt whole and wonderful. He couldn't think of a better present, and was glad that his birthday hadn't been forgotten as he had wished earlier.

Feeling relaxed and truly happy for the first time in many years, Remus loitered at the supper table, eating cake, and relishing in the jovial companionship of his friends. He had missed this - feeling almost like a normal person. So he was reluctant to seal himself in his cell, even though he felt the almost irresistible pull of the nearly full moon. It wouldn't reach its zenith until the next night, and for now, the wolfsbane potion was doing its job.

Looking around at the faces of the people he loved, he noticed that Harry seemed a bit antsy and preoccupied. Then at a lull in the conversation, the little boy finally spoke up and broached the question that had been plaguing him all afternoon. "I have to write an essay about Saint Patrick this weekend and I don't know anything about him except that there's a Saint Patrick's Day 'bout a week from now. Do you know anything I can write?"

"Saint Patrick's Day is coming up?" James said with a note of melancholy in his voice. "Saint Patrick's Day is... was... Padfoot's birthday."

"That's right. We were all March babies..." Remus said with a far-away look in his eyes... "It was just one other thing that made us brothers. Me on the tenth, Padfoot on the seventeenth, and you on the twenty-seventh."

"You're forgetting someone..." Lily said thinking of Peter, the fourth Marauder whose birthday had fallen on March first.

"No I'm not." James said petulantly, "I'm purposely rewriting the calendar to exclude that particular day. February doesn't have enough days anyway. It's always been a rather short nasty little month. It deserves to have the short nasty little rat's day added to it. From now on March starts on the second."

"But... Daddy...?" Harry whined tugging on his sleeve and at his heartstrings at the same time. "I have to write about Saint Patrick! I don't think my teacher wants to hear about birthdays."

"Right you are... well let's see now... how about... Saint Patrick was a great guy and who drove all the snakes out of Ireland in a turquoise 1962 Ford Angelica. But unfortunately, forgot to offer the same service to Hogwarts."

"James!"

"Just kidding Lily."

"Don't you like snakes?" Harry asked a little fearful that his slinky friends would also be taboo around his parents, as were dogs. During the long hot summers when he slaved in his Aunt's garden, the little grass snakes were the only friends that he had had. He would hate to lose them too.

"Oh they're all right... just not my favorite, say like lions, or even the spare raven or badger. But I suppose there is a place for them somewhere in the world too."

"Very big of you James."

"Thanks Remus."

"I like grass snakes... oh sorry... Natrix Natrix." Harry said as he studiously stabbed at his cake with his fork. "They're funny."

"Funny?" James said looking at his son oddly. Where did he learn the Latin for grass snake? "I can't seem to remember that ever being a word used to describe any snake I ever met."

"They talk really low and slow and they use big words just like Mr. Nathraichean, only they hiss a lot more."

"Oh they do, do they? Don't tell me you now want a snake as a pet?"

"No, still a puppy..." Harry said wistfully.

"Well maybe if you can find one that talks like your snakes do, I'll consider it." James said winking at Remus.

"James! Quit getting his hopes up when you know you don't mean it." Lily admonished him from across the table.

"Oh but I do Lil... think about it. If Harry finds a dog that can talk..."

"But James... I know you want it to be different, we all do, but Sirius is gone. You have to face it, he drown. We were too late." She said softly.

"I know what they said Lil. But I can still hope they were wrong. And if he did find him, then that is one mutt I would say yes to."

"But what are the chances? They said they found his body. Look at him..." Lily said nodding at Harry whose face was alternating between hopeful and crestfallen, "...it's not fair to tease him like that."

"You're right Lily, there's only a one in a million chance. Pay me no attention son, your old man was just indulging in a little wishful thinking."

"Wishing about what?"

“Wishing your godfather would just miraculously come home like Moony did. But it would take an awful lot of luck for that to happen, and we’re fresh out of that, along with everything else.” He said before draining the last drop out of his coffee mug, and gazing sadly at the empty pot.

“Mr. Nathraichean says there no such thing as luck. He says it’s all folding and rolling.”

“Folding and rolling?”

“Yeah, and Mr. Nathraichean also said the legend of Saint Patrick was about a bird.” Harry added, tactfully bringing the conversation back to his choice of topics. “I thought it was about leprechauns.”

“Lily, either this Mr. Nathraichean is a nut job, or we need to get young one’s hearing checked.” James frowned.

“I think young one just needs to pay attention in class, and not be daydreaming when the teacher is talking. There is nothing the matter with his hearing. In fact he hears all too much sometimes.”

“Is that right young one?”

“...yes sir...” Harry said softly hanging his head.

“So what was it the teacher really said about Saint Patrick?”

“I don’t know... I wasn’t exactly paying attention in class and now I have to write an essay about it before Monday morning and Mr. Nathraichean already doesn’t like me...” he trailed off pathetically.

“Well, we can’t have that, can we Moony?” James asked giving the other man a knowing look. They too had had their share of ‘not exactly paying attention’ in class and getting into trouble for it.

“No indeed Prongs. I think between the two of us we can fill Harry with enough facts for one essay.”

“Fill him with a lot of folderol you mean.” Lily snorted.

“That’s the word! Folderol!” Harry squealed in delight.

“Ah... ‘folderol’... folding and rolling... so ‘about a bird’ must have been what?....” James said puzzled tapping his forehead in thought.

“Absurd?” Remus guessed.

“By Jove I think you’ve got it! Ten points for Gryffindor!” James called out as he swung Harry out of his chair and carried him into the living room and tossed him on the couch. “Now for the legend of Saint Patrick, it’s not absurd at all...”

Lily, James, and Remus spent the next few hours debating all the myths and legends they could think of surrounding Saint Patrick. Over the years, Remus had traveled several times in America, where the holiday was celebrated more widely and raucously, so he added a lot of their modern day lore and customs to the mix, until Harry’s head was swimming with snakes, leprechauns, four-leaf clovers, wish-bones, green rivers, and rainbows with pots of gold at their ends. By the time night had fallen in earnest he was sleeping curled up on his father’s lap mumbling about hunting for luck.

After Remus left for his own flat for the remainder of the weekend, James and Lily carried Harry in to bed and tucked him in.

“I must remind Harry to not leave the window open.” Lily said distractedly, reaching over with a nursing Holly cradled in her arms, she slid down the pane of glass to shut out the damp evening air. “But he is doing a very nice job of keeping his room clean.” she observed looking around at the tidy room with a reluctant approval.

“What? You mean there are no fanged tootsie-eating dust bunnies under the bed for you to eradicate? Are you feeling as if you aren’t needed or something?” James teased.

“It’s just that he’s so- so self-sufficient. Yesterday he even offered to watch Holly so I could take a nap. Sometimes I wonder who the mum is.” Then as an early spring thundercloud let loose a flash of lightning, she turned to look out into twilight and shuddered. “It looks like we’re

in for a storm again tonight. It isn't going to be a fit night out for man, nor beast. Speaking of which, we know where one of our 'beasts' are, and he's safe and sound." she said fondly speaking of Remus. "But where do you think the other really is? Do you think they're telling the truth and that he did drown in the sea? Or do you think he somehow managed to do the impossible and is somewhere safe? He did so much for us... it breaks my heart we were so close but so late... I really want to believe he's out there... somewhere."

"I do too." James sighed. "After reading those articles about us that were dead wrong, I don't trust anything I read now. But I don't know what else to think, I don't realistically see how he could have made it. And I know it's foolish to even hope. I just don't know... maybe Harry can find us some of that luck and he'll come back to us." James said wrapping his arms around her and the baby to warm them up.

"I hope so."

"Me too, my love, me too."

... (thump)...

"There they go again!" James said glaring at the ceiling.

"At least it's not as loud in here." Lily agreed as she led him out of the room and shutting the door behind them.

... (thump)... (Thump)...

'...I'm just a little dust bunny... '

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...

'...there's nothing under the bed at alllll to worry about...'

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...

'...probably...'

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...
(thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...
(thump)...

“Wha’?” Harry asked groggily rubbing his eyes and feeling around for his glasses and not finding them or the wall nearby on either side, or the ceiling low over his head, or the floor directly under his mattress. Everything felt wrong, and sounded wrong. He was a little disoriented as he didn’t remember going to bed, and yet he was in a bed, a nice soft warm bed with a fluffy pillow. Oh no! He must be in Dudley’s room! He must have fallen asleep while he was cleaning it! He had to be quiet! He had to stop making that noise! His aunt and uncle were sure to be mad! Sitting up with a start, he heard Holly cooing in her sleep on the other side of the room and his heart slowed back down, and he let out the breath he hadn’t realized he had been holding. He wasn’t in his cupboard. He was home. This was his bed. This was his room... but he wasn’t making that noise...

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...

It seemed to be coming from under his bed... his bed, the one that had a yawning hole directly connected to the netherworld under it...

... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)... (thump)...

No, make that ‘definitely’. The noise was definitely coming from under his bed. And it was getting louder...

... (THUMP)... (THUMP)... (THUMP)... (THUMP)... (THUMP)...

And it was definitely coming out from under his bed!

...THUMP!... THUMP!... THUMP!... THUMP!... LICK!...

“AAAaaagggghhhh!” He was about to die! The toe-eating dust bunnies were attacking! But then as flashbacks to the playground attack played through his mind he identified the slobbering wet tongue as one that could only belong to a dog. He started to shout with joy, “You’re here! I got my wish!”, but remembering in time to be

quiet, it just came out as a loud whisper instead. "Come up here!" he said patting the bed.

The big dog didn't need any further invitation as on top of the bed, and on top of his boy, was exactly where he intended to be. The dog stepped onto the mattress without much effort at all and plopped himself down on top of the boy and proceeded lick every bit of him he could reach with his large pink tongue.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Harry giggled at the bath. "I was so worried about you!" Harry said hugging the mangy mutt. "Where did you go? Mr. Nathraichean thought I made you up."

'... who's that?... do I care? ...I don't think I care... do I? ...probably not... my fur's wet... and you smell like steak... do you have steak?... I like steak even more than I like chicken... I like you! ... I found you... you thought you could hide... but you couldn't... I found you... I found my boy... and he smells like steak!...'

"I didn't get to introduce myself earlier, I'm Harry. But I don't know who you are," he said looking at the dog puzzled, "are you a Daisy or a Cosmos?"

Now it was the dog's turn to look puzzled and he just cocked his big shaggy head at him with his tongue lolling out one side.

'...what?...'

"Are you a girl dog?"

'... grrrrr...'

"Are you a boy dog then?"

"Woof!"

"Quiet!" Harry shushed him, "Then you're 'Cosmos'! Isn't that a great name! Of course if you had been a girl dog it was going to be 'Daisy', but you're a boy dog so it's 'Cosmos' instead!"

‘...oh you named me?...pretty sure of yourself aren’t you? ...what if I already have a perfectly good name?...’ the dog thought with a slightly miffed look on his face.

“Don’t you like ‘Cosmos’? I thought it was nice...”

‘...well it is appropriate ... covers the entire galaxy that way ...not just a random star here or there ... rather all inclusive and impressive ... I suppose it would do...’ the dog mused to himself before giving the boy an accepting lick.

“I’m glad you like it,” Harry giggled in return, “I always liked them... the flowers you know.”

‘...flowers? You named me after a... a flower...’ the dog looked alarmed. “...I thought you meant the galaxy, the universe, all the stars in the heavens, the cosmos!...” He was suddenly doubtful to what he had just agreed to be called.

“Aunt Petunia said they were weeds though... cosmos are those bright pink ones on really skinny stalks. She didn’t like them at all and made me pull them up and throw them on the compost pile whenever she saw one growing in her beds. But I liked them. I thought they were kind of friendly and they waved at me when I was weeding.”

‘...hrumph!... kicked out of bed by a woman I never even met... life does go on without you doesn’t it?... ‘Cosmos’ will be fine for now... if for no other reason than Aunt Petunia doesn’t like them and I don’t like her... but think of the bright sparkly things in the night sky instead of the dead weeds okay?...’

After wearing himself out with another enthusiastic tongue attack, the newly christened Cosmos rolled over onto his back for a well deserved tummy rub.

“YAY! I hope my parents will let me keep you.”

‘...keep me?...’ Cosmos thought puzzled. Didn’t the kid understand who he was? He was going to keep the boy, not the other way

around. As far as he was concerned these 'parents' of his didn't have a choice in the matter.

"If they let me keep you then I can play with you, and you can walk me to school and back, and sleep by my bed, and chase Dudley for me!"

'...Dudley? You mean that big mean blonde kid I saw sitting on you at lunch?...'

"That's Dudley right now." Harry said pointing at the ceiling from whence a loud 'THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!' was coming.

'...Hefty fellow isn't he?...' Cosmos thought, a low growl coming from his throat.

"Dudley is why I really really really really REALLY need a dog! But... but Daddy said 'no'. Well Mummy did too kind of, but only if Daddy did... and he did...so she did too... so do you see?" he pleaded.

'...what if I'm not 'available' to be your dog? I might have plans of my own...' Cosmos thought in a sudden pique. Really, didn't this boy know he was the one being owned? Not the other way around?

"If I can get Daddy to say yes will you be my dog?" Harry asked looking woefully pitiful and dogless. "I'll be really really good to you. You'll like it here, I do."

'... well... if you put it that way, I could stick around. For a little while... that is... and is that steak I smell? I'm very hungry. One of the rules of responsible dog ownership you know... got to feed 'em... and often... especially steak...'

"Oh I'll bet your hungry! I'll be right back! I didn't eat all my supper and there is some steak left over. But you better hide! Holly's crib is in here too so Mummy or Daddy might come in and they can't see you yet!" Harry said jumping up as Cosmos crawled under the bed.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

“Can’t you make them stop?” James asked pulling his fingers out of his ears and complaining loudly just as Harry cracked the door open to his room, to check and see if the coast was clear.

“You know it’s your own fault. Vernon and Petunia aren’t all that swift sometimes but they do know when they’ve been tricked. They are just paying you back.”

“But I just gave them exactly what they asked for.” James snickered. “We rebuilt their house with improvements, put two brand new cars in the garage, listed two vacation homes in their names, and of course the pièce de résistance, quote... ‘All of their personal items restored exactly as they were before all that nasty business’ ...unquote. Was it my fault that the Insurance Investigators took offense to Dursley filing a claim on a destroyed house and belonging that were obviously intact and unblemished? Was it my fault that the investigators then jumped to the conclusion that the insurance money bought the swimming pool and sauna and put escrow money down on the vacation homes? And was it my fault that the police thought it wrong for them to be storing stolen cars in their garage?

“No, no, and a definite yes. You could have gotten them arrested, and not just their house and belongings seized to repay the insurance company for fraud! And you know what would have happened then...”

“Dudley would have moved in with us, instead of the whole family moving back into the building into our old flat upstairs.” James said with a shudder. “It’s a good thing that we convinced the police the cars weren’t really stolen and that the neighbors just mistakenly parked them in the wrong garage. If it weren’t that all those blasted houses looked identical they probably wouldn’t have believed us.”

“Yes it’s a very good thing. I don’t want to see my sister in jail. I can make her regret her actions much better than any muggle jail ever could. So you two had better stop your pranks! And besides what did it get you?” She asked shaking her finger at him.

“The larger flat.” he said smugly. “And we needed the larger one so Harry could have a bed.” he pointed out practically.

"But in all your cleverness you didn't get the signatures! And wasn't that the whole point of your prank?!"

"We almost did... it wasn't our fault that the neighbors came back early and noticed their cars missing. If the police had come knocking even one minute later, we would have had it Lil! And we did get Petunia's, and Vernon had pen to paper. See!" he said holding out the adoption papers.

"All I see is a 'V' and if I don't see the 'ernon Dursley' to go with it soon, the police will come knocking for you."

"But you owe me! Remember? A BIG ONE - for the dog! Can't you forgive me? Just a little?"

"Okay... deal. I forgive you for almost having my only sister thrown into jail, and for not getting Vernon's signature on the documents...yet. You have one week. Get it done." She said crossing her arms determinedly and tapping her foot.

"But..."

"You asked me to forgive you 'just a little' so I am giving you exactly what you asked for. I do forgive you 'just a little'... for one little week. Now we're even again." Lily said even more smugly.

"But one week! Where are we supposed to come up with all the money he wants now that fast? I mean the house and belongings were easy, we just restored those from the ashes with magic, and the 'improvements' were just illusion and didn't cost a thing either. He mostly wanted them for 'show' not really to use, so unless he did a swan dive into the deep end, he wouldn't have figured out any time bloody soon that the swimming pool was a transformed birdbath and the sauna an old shoebox we got out of the trash. But we couldn't do everything by magic, we had to steal... um... let me rephrase that... borrow the new cars, and we pooled every last cent you both made teaching for the escrow money on the vacation homes. It did get his name on the deeds, but it was non-refundable! It should have worked! It was a great plan! If the Insurance Company hadn't seized

them as well, it would have taken Vernon a couple of months to figure out all he had was the paper to a couple of expensive mortgages. I spent everything we had on that plan. We're tapped out. We'd need a lot of luck to get anymore anytime soon. I'm never home now as it is, working double shifts! Give me a little more time to figure it out."

"It's not my deadline. I had tea with Petunia this afternoon. I was going to wait and talk to you about it in the morning so as not to spoil Remus' party, but I suppose now is as good a time as any." Lily said before taking a deep breath and breaking the bad news, "Vernon is only giving us one more week to come up with the money, until the seventeenth. And after what you and your partner in crime tried to pull, he is NOT in the mood to negotiate, this time he wants it all in cash. Petunia says he going to take Harry away from us for good if we don't come up with it."

James went pale as that news started to sink in and Harry quietly closed the cracked open door and sat back down on his bed. Drawing his knees up to his chest, he wrapped his arms around them in a hug and started to sob silently, until a furry head prodded his face off from his knees and started to lick up his salty tears.

"I'm sorry Cosmos. I'll get you the leftovers after they go to bed. I just don't want to go in there right now. Mummy and Daddy are mad."

The big dog whined and put his head on the little boy's lap with a definite 'What's wrong?' question in his eyes.

"Everything is wrong.... No, not everything, that isn't right. It's mostly just me. I'm really expensive."

'...You are?...' Cosmos wondered looking around the modest little room. It was tidy and pleasant, freshly painted in a creamy yellow with a bright green coverlet on the little bed, and a matching one on the baby's crib. There were a few books and crayons and a stuffed animal in the shape of a stag on the pillow, but it was by no means stuffed with clothes, pricey toys, or costly items.

"I was taking up too much room, so Daddy got this larger flat, so I could have my own bedroom. But now they can't afford it. If I can't

find them some money and lots of it really soon, I have to go back to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia..." Harry started to tremble and added very softly, "...I don't want to go back. I don't want to leave Daddy and Mummy and Holly. And if... if I do, Aunt Petunia wouldn't let you come with me either."

The dog whined and pawed at his boy. He did not want the little boy to go anywhere he didn't want to go either. And he absolutely would NOT be going anywhere without him! There may be many things he was a bit hazy on right now, but that was one fact he was absolutely certain of. The big dog nudged him under the covers and settled him down in bed.

'...you won't be going anywhere without me...' Cosmos thought as the boy's quiet sobs turned into rhythmic breathing. Gripping the edge of the blanket with his mouth, he gently pulled it up under the boy's chin to tuck him in. The chicken hadn't lasted all day and he was hungry again. He needed something to eat but the arguing voices of 'the parents' in the other room made him decide to dine out. He'd save the steak for a tasty snack later, he thought licking his lips.

Taking another look around the little room, he pawed at the window pane until he could nudge it the rest of the way open with his nose. Jumping through it easily, he landed on all four paws in the alley and looked backwards at the building. It loomed dark above him against the thunderclouds, which were still luminous with the afterglow of lightning.

'...don't worry. I'll be back soon...' the dog thought as he disappeared into the gathering gloom.

"James, I..."

"Shush Lily...he's still asleep," James said poking his head in the room before carrying in Holly and tucking her in too.

"I was just trying to say I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier, that wasn't fair." Lily followed him in whispering, "I was just frustrated with my sister and her husband. They're so greedy. I don't understand their attitude. Family should always come first. Always."

"I love you Rosie-posy." James said placing a lingering kiss on her lips. "And don't worry, we will get through this. I was talking to Remus before supper and he came up with a great idea of how we might be able to make a withdrawal from Gringotts without letting anyone know we're alive just yet."

"How?"

"He has some old parchment and ink, nicely aged, and I'm going to write out a letter of authorization with it, granting him access to our vaults, and date it back to October thirtieth of eighty-one the day before everyone thinks we 'died'. Then he's going to use it make the withdrawal for us."

"Do you think it will really work?" Lily asked dubiously. "The Goblins are notorious for what they do to people why try to take out gold that isn't theirs. I don't want anything to happen to Remus."

"But that's the beauty of it. The letter will be truly genuine, except for the date. I think it'll work. At least it's a shot. We were going wait until the end of the month when the Ministry pays all their personnel. We thought if they were busy, there would be less of a chance they would look too closely, but we'll just move it up to next week. The full moon is tomorrow night but as soon as he recovers and he hears Vernon's deadline, I'm sure he'll head for London."

"Oh James, and then Harry will be all ours again, truly ours."

"And then we can tell Vernon where to shove his gold, and we'll head back home."

"Back home..." Lily said wistfully.

"Yes, back home my love."

"James?"

"Yes Lily?"

“Where is home? You know we never have discussed that. The cottage in Godric’s Hollow was destroyed, and I don’t think I could go back there anyway.”

“My home is wherever you and Harry and Holly are.”

“... and Remus?”

“And Remus.”

“... and ...Sirius?”

“If wishes were horses...” James just held her tight and as he started swaying and humming in her ear. He loved Lily so much he didn’t have words to express it. Not only did she make his life complete but she was willing to make room in their family for his de-facto brothers. It was not just any woman who would willingly do that.

As the lightning lent its bright glow to the little bedroom, they shared a dance to the gentle cadence breathing of their peacefully dreaming children, children who were dreaming of puppies. In Harry’s dreams the puppy was a big mangy black one, and in Holly’s it looked suspiciously like her favorite teething toy, her daddy’s wand. Both children sighed happily in their sleep as the dance came to an end and with a kiss to each of their foreheads, their parents slipped out of the room.

One floor up Dudley was not in bed. He had the only bedroom in the first floor flat, while his parents slept on a pullout sofa bed in the living room. It just wasn’t fair! This room was so dinky! It was much smaller than the one he had downstairs, and that one was even smaller than his room on Privet Drive, not to mention that on Privet Drive he had two rooms. Auntie Lily really should have let them at least have the ground floor flat back! Life was not being fair to Dudley Dursley.

This time before they lost their house, he had rescued several of his video games along with his BB gun. While the Insurance Investigators had been yelling at his parents downstairs he had been upstairs shoving his pockets full of everything he could. He had even done his best to heft his telly under one arm, and his computer under

the other, and had almost made it waddling out of the house with his load, before they took his stuff away from him for 'evidence'. They let him keep the games since they were opened and couldn't be returned to the store, but what good were video games without the computer or telly to play them on?

Now sitting at the window of his dinky room with nothing to do but write a stupid essay or go to bed, he watched the alley below him and pretended to be a big game hunter. His dad said that someday he would take him on a safari. Through the rain, which had started to pour with earnest, he watched with interest as a large dark shadow slunk closer with each intermittent flash of lightning, closer and closer, towards where his downstairs bedroom window used to be. Taking sight down the barrel, he aimed and squeezed the trigger. The little 'pop' was drowned out by a clap of thunder, but Dudley grinned as the shadow slumped to the ground. He was getting to be a fine shot, if he did say so himself. That was about the only thing he did like about the upstairs flat, it had a much better vantage spot for his target practice. Auntie Lily should be happy he protected them. Maybe she would let them have their ground floor flat back. He should ask her, he thought as he climbed into bed. Wouldn't hurt, he might at least get breakfast out of it if nothing else.

Sunday morning dawned fresh and clear and the first thing on Harry's mind was his dog. His dog. It had a nice ring to it. He would have to make him a collar and a tag so no one would mistake him for a stray anymore. And he should get him a cushion to sleep on, and a squeaky toy to play with, and a big bone to chew on, and a dog dish for his food, and a bowl for water, and....

"... and I forgot to feed him! I promised him steak and I fell asleep instead!" Harry dropped upside down over the edge of his bed and peeked under it. NO DOG!!!! Not even a dust bunny! He lost him already! Maybe his aunt was right, he thought, maybe he wasn't responsible enough to own a dog. Hurriedly jumping up and getting dressed he pulled a comb through his hair a couple of times before giving up the fight, and then shoving his feet in his trainers he picked up a gurgling Holly and went out to the kitchen, where his mum was already building up a nice stack of golden brown flapjacks.

"Watch this!" she called out as he came in just in time to see the next one sail through the air and land on the floor, missing the plate entirely. "Well... I can do it when no one is watching." She said ruefully picking up the foiled flap and dropping it in the dust bin.

"If I had a dog he could clean that up for you." Harry sensibly pointed out.

"Nice try little one." Lily laughed putting the stack in front of him and ruffling his hair. She was determined that nothing was going to spoil her good mood...

Ding – Dong

"Auntie Lily?" Dudley's voice came floating through the keyhole. "I can see you! May I come for breakfast?"

...nothing, except for that.

"No Dudley you may not. Your breakfast is upstairs. I am still not pleased with your behavior." Lily called back through the closed door. She wanted to develop a relationship with her nephew, but really! Blackmailing her son! That was NOT something she was going to reward or forget anytime soon.

"But Auntie! I wanted to tell you something. Something important!" Dudley whined. This was not working out the way he had planned.

"So tell me." Lily called back, still not opening the door.

"I protected you!"

"And just how did you do that?" she asked suspiciously.

"I shot a prowler in the alley last night with my BB gun."

"YOU DID WHAT!?!!" Lily screamed and opened the door to see Dudley standing there holding his BB gun and beaming proudly from ear to ear.

"I sh-shot a prowler in the al-alley?" Dudley stuttered out to his enraged aunt, as he wilted under her outraged glare.

"Hrumph!" Lily reached out, snatched the weapon out of his hands, and then slammed the door in his startled face.

"GO. HOME. NOW!" she roared.

Well that was unexpected. Dudley thought angrily as he stomped back upstairs to his own flat, to where his plate of burned bacon and singed French toast awaited him. It just wasn't fair! Why did everyone pick on him?

"James!" Lily yelled out. "Come quick! Dudley has done something!"

"What's the little - ... (ahem)... - done now?" He was frowning already at the tone of urgency in Lily's voice as he toweled off his messy black hair still damp from the shower.

"He said he shot something. Something in the alley last night. You don't think..." Lily paled.

"My Gods! Remus! Harry stay with Holly!" James yelled over his shoulder as he took out the front door with Lily close on his heels. Rounding the corner to the alley, he stopped short at a dark stain still visible in the rough gravel. Squatting down he put his fingers in the sticky remnants and sniffed. "He got something all right. It's blood. But the rain has washed away most of it, hard to tell how much there was. Could have just been a flesh wound... or not..."

Springing up, he started pounding on the door to the basement flat while Lily thoroughly searched the alley for the injured person or beast. James was relieved to hear a healthy growl in response to his ruckus. Remus was still safely sealed in his cement cell. It wasn't his blood. Lily was relieved not to find a dead body, though she had steeled herself in case she did.

"It must have been a stray cat." James said partially relieved, happy that at least it wasn't his friend, but sad that any creature was somewhere out there in pain because of his thoughtless nephew.

“Don’t worry, it must not have been too bad a wound, or it would still be here.” he reassured Lily as they walked back around and entered their flat.

“I’ve got to go to work now.” James said kissing her goodbye, “Do try to have a nice day, despite how it started out, okay?” he added worriedly seeing the dangerous sparks in the redhead’s eyes.

“I’ll try... by the way you’ll have to pick up something at the Grocery for lunch, the steak leftovers as well as the end of the bologna is gone.”

“I did borrow everything Remus had...” James shrugged. “...so if he wants to raid the icebox every night he can. Besides, I don’t think I’d want to argue with him over a bit a meat at this time of the month anyway. He can get a might cranky.” James said cracking a smile at the understatement as he waved goodbye and started trotting down the pavement towards work.

Lily sighed as she watched him go. This was going to be a long week. She just hoped that James and Remus’ latest plot would work and she could hold her temper long enough for them to get the rest of Vernon’s signature. That was all that mattered right now. The issue of Dudley’s outrageous behavior would have to be addressed later. She couldn’t risk angering her sister and brother-in-law any more than they already were.

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked curiously, looking up from the table where he was playing airplane-and-hanger with the spoon while he fed Holly her favorite mashed bananas, his eyes growing round at the sight of his mum carrying Dudley’s BB gun and looking grim.

“Promise me young man that you will never thoughtlessly hurt another living being just for the pleasure of it.” Lily demanded as she transformed the BB gun into a non-lethal water pistol.

“I promise.” Harry said with all sincerity, he couldn’t imagine ever doing it anyway and wondered what he had done to make his mum think he would, it was probably Dudley’s fault, his eyes narrowing crossly at the thought. Leave it to his cousin to get him into trouble

without even being here. He was good at that. He'd had lots of practice.

"Good. Enough said. Now eat your breakfast." Lily, who was still bristling at the thought of what her nephew had done, absentmindedly placed an empty plate before him and scraped the flapjacks in the dustbin.

'Well, at least I have orange juice.' Harry thought uncomplainingly as he started to reach for the glass only to have his mum sweep it up with the rest of the dishes on the table and start to wash it with a vengeance while she muttered under her breath about spoiled rotten undeserving children that were a menace to society and had better stay out of her way if they knew what was good for them.

"I'm going to my room now..." Harry decided to error on the side of discretion. It was better to go to his room now, and not wait until he was banished to it in punishment for whatever it was Dudley had done. That was the normal course of events for his life up to now. Dudley misbehaved. Harry got blamed for it. Harry was deprived food. Harry was locked up in his cupboard. Dudley got a present. So far, everything was on course. He had been waiting for months for his parents to start behaving normally towards him like his Aunt and Uncle had, and it was finally starting.

"That's good." Lily replied without really listening, so she missed the wistful tone. "I have to go out later and return Dudley's gun, but I'll take Holly with me. Make sure you don't leave the flat, and keep the doors locked."

"Yes'm." He took one last longing look at his mum as he quietly closed the door. At least it was bigger than his cupboard, and it had a window he thought as he closed the pane before he went to sit dejectedly on his bed.

It wasn't very many minutes before a wet nose pressed it's way past his doldrums and two big soulful eyes looked up at him as if to ask '...what's wrong? Maybe you would feel better if you scratched me? That always makes me feel better...'

“You’re back! And you’re okay!” Harry said throwing his arms around the big dog’s neck sobbing little hiccuppy sobs. “I thought you’d left me, or maybe Dudley had shot you!”

‘... Leave you? Never! What kind of good boy-ownership would that be? Don’t cry I was here most of the night... I just had to go out this morning for a bit to ah... ahem... do my ‘business’...’ Cosmos thought embarrassedly as he bathed all the tears off his boy’s face with his wet tongue. ‘Now to find out what is bothering him and to make it right...’

“I thought for a minute my wish really hadn’t come true.”

‘...wish?...’

Harry laughed at the comical look on the dog face. Cosmos looked as puzzled at what Harry had said, as Harry himself must look when Mr. Nathraichean starts spouting all those long words.

“Yes I made a wish last night on my uncle’s birthday candle. He said he had had enough birthday wishes, and I hadn’t had any so far, so he let me have his. I wasn’t sure it would work, as it wasn’t really my birthday, but I wished anyway, and I wished for you and you came. So I guess birthday candle wishes are lucky. But daddy says I can only have a dog if I find one that can talk, so I guess I should have wished for that too, but I made the birthday candle wish before I knew that or I would have added that too, but I didn’t and so you can’t and so I probably can’t keep you.” He finished all in one breath and a jumble of words.

‘... hm... this is a promising start... if he believes in luck, and wishes, then maybe he believes in magic too... maybe the muggles haven’t done such a horrible job as I thought... and he wants me to talk... so I need to transform...but how without scaring him?... I know! What he needs is another wish... and I’ve got just the thing!...’

Cosmos jumped off the bed, and crawling on his tummy, he slid once again under the little bunk, this time coming forth with the remnants of his late night snacks, chicken bones. Nosing through the refuse, he

separated the wishbone and taking one end in his mouth, he presented the other end to his boy.

“You want me to make another wish?” Harry asked looking at the dog with new eyes. Last night his uncle had mentioned that if you made a wish while breaking a wishbone that it could be lucky if you got the larger half, just like a birthday candle wish was lucky if you blew it out on the first try. But how did the dog know? “You want me to make a wish, so you can talk and I can keep you?”

The big shaggy dog nodded its head, and with a hopeful look on his face, offered the end of the wishbone again.

“I wish... I wish you could talk so I could keep you.” Harry wished fervently as he scrunched his eyes tight and pulled on the wishbone until he felt it snap in two. Opening them wide he found only a short stub in his hand. “It didn’t work... I got the little half...” he said dully, but any further words stuck in his throat as a long thin hand with dirty ragged fingernails, reached out and dropped the larger half into his palm alongside its mate.

“But I wished for it too... so I could keep you.” Cosmos replied gently as he squatted down to the boy’s eye level. The eyes were the same, gray, kind, and fathomless pools of emotion, and right now, they were begging for acceptance and understanding, instead of food or a scratch behind his ears.

“...Cosmos?... Is that you?” Harry breathed with awe.

The man with the long black scraggly hair nodded yes and Harry practically shouted ‘YAY!’ throwing his arms around the man’s neck in a happy hug until Cosmos started hugging him back so hard he could hardly breathe and he broke away frightened.

“You are a dog... right?” Harry said suddenly doubtful.

“Sometimes,” the man shrugged, a little hurt that he had obviously scared the boy by hugging him back, but he really shouldn’t have expected any differently in his current unwashed condition. Being realistic, he should have been more surprised that he hadn’t already

run screaming from the room to get away from him. "I am whenever I want to be. And for the last eight years I have wanted to be one most of the time."

"Can you be one right now?" Harry asked unconvinced.

"Sure." He said transforming back into his shaggy canine form and started gently licking Harry's face again, and then more enthusiastically until he knocked him down to the rug.

Giggling and very relieved Harry sat up and hugged the mangy beast again. "I was worried there for a minute. I thought maybe you weren't really a dog after all and it was a trick. Then Mummy would have really said there wasn't room for you and made you leave. If there isn't room for a dog, there really isn't room for a boogey-man, even a nice one."

Changing back into a man, Cosmos cracked the window open before sitting down companionably by the little boy's side with one arm slung across his shoulders, but being cautious not to scare him again.

"I guess I do kind of look like a boogey-man." He said ruefully.

"A little... but I'm not scared now that I know you are really a dog." Harry said sincerely.

Cosmos had been observing Harry from afar for almost five days now, stealthily watching from underneath bushes and from around corners until he was positive he had found the right child, his child, his godchild. The child, that for the past eight years, he thought he had failed. The child, who was oblivious to the danger he was in. The child, whom he had broken out of prison, and swum across a raging sea to protect with his life if need be. Now that he found him, nobody was going to make him leave him again, he thought fiercely. If he had to steal him from these unreasonable muggles who took him in to do it, he would.

When he had followed him home from school he noticed that while most of the other children had a mother or father pick them up, Harry never did. Harry always walked by himself (or more usually chased

by that fat bully) to the rundown building where he lived in the ground floor flat. After the boy got home, Cosmos never saw him come back out and go to the play park as his cousin did, or even go to the little corner market. Cosmos had never even seen him outside at all, except for going to and from school. These 'parents' of his seemed to keep him locked away tight. They probably made him slave away at chores once he got home, and never let him play at all, the dirty rotten sots! Even at lunchtime, he never played with the other kids, except for being their target, and that couldn't be much fun. Cosmos didn't know why his little godson was so lonely and friendless, but if any boy needed a dog, his did, especially a dog that was also a wizard and could protect him, unlike these neglectful selfish muggles who were raising him.

Cosmos was the most puzzled as to how his godchild had come to be separated from the magical world, and why muggles were raising him, instead of James and Lily. And where was Remus? He told Remus where to find them... at least he think he did. He couldn't really remember that night all that clearly. But he did remember leaving James and Lily in care of doctors. But surely, in eight years Remus would have found them anyway, and told them that their son was alive. But... maybe... maybe James and Lily hadn't pulled through after all? Maybe their injuries were graver than the doctors had thought. Merlin! He had never considered that! Maybe he made it worse by moving them, if they died because of it, than it would have been his fault! No wonder Remus left him in Azkaban, he probably blamed him for their deaths too. Ironical if true, falsely accused of betraying them and getting them killed, but guilty of their deaths anyway because of his Good Samaritan acts. Perhaps he did deserve to rot for all eternity in Azkaban.

The torn bit of the newspaper article, that someone had smuggled into his prison cell along with the gruel, hadn't exactly been elaborate with details, but he knew the situation was not safe for Harry. Death Eaters had already attacked the muggle relatives that he had been reported to have been living with for the last eight years. According to the news report, Harry was already missing from the house before the time of the attack. The ministry to their shame had to admit to having lost track of him. No one, on either side, admitted to knowing where he currently was, but there was a lot of speculation that he had

been kidnapped during the raid and was being held by Death Eaters in case the Dark Lord returned.

Cosmos hadn't believed the article. Harry had survived the first attack by Lord Voldemort himself. Surely, he had survived the second one of mere Death Eaters too. Cosmos was positive the speculation couldn't possibly be true. If it had been, almost the entire population of Azkaban would have been celebrating, and they weren't. They were as much in the dark as to what had happened to the 'boy-who-lived' as the Ministry was. But Cosmos finally knew he had to take the chance and try to escape, his boy was in mortal danger. He had to find him. He had to protect him. With James and Lily dead... and they must be if Harry wasn't with them... and Remus having deserted him, Harry was all he had left of his family. These muggles couldn't protect him. They obviously didn't know about the evil that was lurking outside their door. And even if they did, they wouldn't be a match for it. No, it was up to him.

Cosmos leaned back against the desk and looked speculatively at his boy. "Is that the only reason your parents won't let you have a dog? Because they take up too much room?"

"Yes... mostly..." Harry hedged, not really wanting to admit to his new friend that his irresponsibility was the main cause, but knowing he would have to, if he wanted his help. "My Aunt and Uncle, the ones that I used to live with, said I wasn't responsible enough to take care of a dog, because they got one once for Dudley and it ran away. Mummy and Daddy did say that maybe they would get me a pet, but not a dog. And a dog is what I really really really really REALLY NEED. Not just some stupid old cat."

"Can't blame you there. Dogs are the superior species."

"Then Daddy said I could have one, but only if I found one that could talk... but Mummy said that he was just teasing because dogs can't talk, so that was just a way for him to say 'no' without really saying 'no'. So... if dogs can't talk...why can you?"

"Um... good question... maybe it was because we both wished it at the same time? Kind of a double lucky wish whammy?" Cosmos was

being cautious. He didn't know how much Harry actually knew of the wizarding world, apparently he knew enough not to be too frightened of his transformation, but not enough to recognize him as being an animagus. He was thankful that at least his aunt and uncle hadn't kept him completely in the dark about his parent's world. It would make his job a little easier.

"I know! Maybe..." Harry started to look excited as the wheels started to turn, "...maybe if you could help me show them I'm responsible they would let me keep you!"

"How do you intend to do that?"

"Do you think there is such a thing as luck?"

"Of course, I'm here, aren't I? So there must be such a thing. But what does that have to do with showing your parents you're responsible?"

"Well my daddy is looking for luck. Maybe if you help me find it he would be happy with me, and say yes."

"Sounds like fun. I'm in." Cosmos said standing up and conspiratorially holding out his hand. "I'll help you find some luck and get your dad to say 'yes' to you having a dog, if you help me in return."

"It's a deal!" Harry said enthusiastically jumping up and pumping his hand up and down to seal their bargain, unconcerned about what his half of the bargain might entail. "Oh! I know your name, but you don't know mine... I'm Harry, Harry Krueger."

"Harry... 'Krueger'...?" Cosmos asked with curiosity. Something about that sounded familiar in the mired muck that passed for his memories after the dementors had gotten through scrambling them, but he couldn't quite place it. The 'Harry' was definitely right however.

"You said that just like my teacher does. YES it is 'Krueger', Daddy and Mummy are adopting me and their name is Krueger, so I'm going

to be Harry Krueger.” He said with his hands on his hips a bit exasperated.

“Okay! Okay! Harry Krueger it is, without the verbal quotes.” His boy seemed fiercely loyal to these muggle parents.

“Good!” Harry admonished.

“So Harry Krueger sir, who’s this ‘Uncle’ you mentioned? Not the father of the elephant upstairs is he?”

“Oh NO! That’s my old uncle up there, the one I used to live with, Uncle Vernon.” Harry said pulling a face, “My new uncle is a lot more fun!”

“Ah... and where might this new fun uncle be now?” Cosmos asked a little jealous over how Harry lit up when he mentioned him.

“Oh he had to go to bed.”

“Why? Is he ill?”

“Kind of, he eats too many pies. And when he eats a full one he gets so ill he has to go to bed.”

“Where’s bed?”

“Down there.” Harry said pointing at the floor where the high-pitched whirring sound of a drill could be heard. “He’s putting on more locks so nobody will wake him up. He says you can never be too safe when you’re sleeping.”

“He sounds a bit paranoid. Now me, I prefer absolutely no locks at all. I even like the window open.” Cosmos said as he leaned over and nudged the pane up further up until it was wide open and he could feel the breeze. “Ah! Much better. Say... how about you start making good on your end of the deal and doing something for me?”

“What?”

“Well I am in desperate need of a shower and something to eat. You know that being responsible for a dog means you have to feed them... often...” Cosmos said looking sideways at Harry and noticing the wheels starting to turn in his little head again he thought he should clarify, “...and we really do prefer... (ahem)... ‘people food’ and to wash ourselves.” Harry was quite relieved at this news, he wasn’t sure how he would come up with any money to buy dog food, and he was a little embarrassed at the thought of give Cosmos a bath when he looked more like his daddy than a dog. But if it meant having a dog of his own, he had been willing to try.

“So... um... I think I heard your mum leave the flat a few minutes ago... why don’t you go see if the coast is clear and I’ll just pop into the shower.” Cosmos smiled engagingly at the thought of being clean and well shaven for the first time in eight years. Ooo the hot water was calling him!

“Okay.” Harry said agreeable and went to check out the rest of the flat. Coming back to the door, he told Cosmos that they were the only ones in it, but he didn’t know for how long. Not wanting to waste a second, Cosmos jumped in the shower and turned the water on full blast, practically melting under the soothing pulse of the warm water, pure bliss... Aahhhhhh!!!!

“C’mon! C’mon!” Harry urged Cosmos to hurry as he was later rifling through the bureau in Harry’s parent’s room in search of something better than his rags to wear. Finally grabbing some underwear, a pair of black muggle jeans, and a colorful knit jumper that he found wrapped in a box in the bottom drawer, he threw them on and then tossed his rags in the fireplace and burned them. They would have fit well enough if he hadn’t had been so thin, but oh well, he thought as he started searching the flat for shoes. All of them he found were several sizes longer than his feet. If he only had his wand he could shrink them, but since he didn’t he would just have to keep going barefoot.

“C’mon now!” Harry pleaded again. It was getting late and he didn’t want to get into any more trouble than he was already in. He was sure his mummy would be back soon. It wouldn’t do at all to have her catch him out of his room when he was being punished. If she did,

she might not let him have supper. She had already taken his breakfast away, and even though he had fed Cosmos, he had been careful not to eat anything himself since his mummy hadn't said he could have lunch. And he was getting really hungry. He didn't want to miss out on supper too. They were having spaghetti!

He was greatly relieved when Cosmos put his plate and mug in the sink and followed him obediently back to his room, not realizing when his mum got home and saw the dirty dishes, she would assume that he had had his lunch already.

"You better hide again. I have to finish my homework before supper so I can't play anymore today." Harry directed sternly as he sat down at the desk and started diligently writing on his essay, armed with all the data he had gotten from his parents and uncle, and the colorful stories that Cosmos had added to his arsenal.

Cosmos nodded and transformed into his dog form and crawled under the bed. He had spent a lot longer in the shower than he had intended to but it had felt so good he didn't want to get out. He had borrowed a toothbrush, trimmed his ragged nails, and had managed to shave off his scraggily beard with that strange muggle shaver. That had also taken longer than he expected as it took him a while to figure out how to plug it in and turn it on. While he was taking care of that, Harry had prepared him a huge pile of sandwiches, which he practically inhaled. He felt clean, and full with minty fresh breath. Now all he wanted to do was take a nice long nap. Rolling over onto his back, Cosmos wagged his tail and grinned. The bottom of Harry's bunk above him was plastered with the smoothed out doodles Harry had made of him. Cosmos stretched lazily and then curled up with a contented sigh. Harry might not realize it yet but he hadn't forgotten his dear old godfather.

Monday morning dawned gloriously clear. The day was bright and the air was so crisp it carried sound for kilometers. Harry woke up and hopped out of bed with a grin. He had a Daddy! He had a Mummy! He had a baby sister! He had a nice uncle! He had a bed! And now he HAD A DOG!!!! And... dropping down on all fours, he peered under the bunk.... YES! He was still there! He had tomato sauce all over his face, but at least the face was there.

Harry got dressed, gathered up Holly, and fairly danced with her out to the kitchen where his mum was stirring a nice pot of hot steaming oatmeal.

“Oatmeal? Yuck.”

“It’s for your father, if he’s not careful he’s going to get fat.” Lily said setting a bowl of it in front of James.

“What do you mean Lil? I’m not fat!” James denied poking at the raisins liberally dotting the surface. “They look like dead flies in goo.”

“Shut it and eat.” she replied good naturedly, “You know as well as I do that if you keep up with those midnight snacks you’ll be as big as Vernon.”

“I never! Besides I thought we decided it was Remus.”

“It was the full moon last night so I highly doubt he was up here for a snack or we would have noticed more than the leftover spaghetti gone.”

“Was it you?” James asked of his son who was wolfing down the scrambled eggs and bacon he would have preferred. “And by the way young one, I think it’s a tad early for you to be worrying about shaving. Best leave my razor alone for another year or two, okay?”

“It wasn’t me, Dad.” Harry said, but with a guilty look on his face that attested otherwise. Cosmos did have a lot of tomato sauce on his nicely trimmed muzzle...

“Hrumph!” James snorted a bit skeptical at the denial but decided not to pursue it further. His razor didn’t matter, other than he wanted to be the one to show him how to shave, and the food didn’t matter, as Harry was way too thin. He just wished it didn’t mean he had to eat oatmeal. “Did you get your essay finished?”

“Oh yes. It’s all done.” Harry replied trying not to talk with his mouth full. That was a stupid rule. Why were grownups always saying not to do that and then wait until you take a bite to ask you a question?

“Well hurry up then, I’m going to take you to school on my way to work.”

“That’s okay Daddy. I can walk myself.” Harry said thinking about Cosmos and trying to act casual. “Or I can wait for Dudley,” he offered not intending to follow through.

“Oh no you can’t young one. After the stunt your cousin pulled this weekend, I’m not about to trust him anywhere around you without a chaperone. So grab your schoolbag, I’m walking you both to school, and we need to get going.” James declared swatting Harry playfully on the behind as he dashed back to his room and grabbed his bag.

Dropping down on all fours, he rubbed Cosmos tummy causing him to yawn widely and stretch his out his hind legs. “You better stay under here today. Daddy is talking me to school but Mummy is home so be quiet!”

Cosmos nodded his head and went back to sleep. He could get used to this, a dry place to sleep, tummy rubs, and an icebox full of food.

Dudley stomped to school two steps ahead of his uncle and gave him the silent treatment the entire way. He was embarrassed that his friends might see him being walked to school like a baby. Harry on the other hand held James’ hand the entire way. If he couldn’t have a dog walk him to school, his daddy was just as good. Skipping alongside James, he thought about his dog with a happy heart. He would have to start making him that collar and a tag!

“You’re sure in a good mood today.” James observed.

“Yep!” Harry grinned up at him.

“So what’s up?”

“Oh, nuthin’... I just think Mr. Nathraichean is really going to like my essay.” Harry covered smoothly.

“All this happiness over a homework assignment?” James looked at his son unbelievably but just got a noncommittal shrug in return. “Okay well have a good day then, and knock ‘em dead with your essay.” He said dropping them at the corner of the playground. “You too Dudley... have a good day.”

“Sure,” was Dudley’s one word surly reply as he stomped away to join his friends going into the building.

Harry followed him into class with a lot more confidence than he had had the week before. It was amazing what knowing he owned a dog could do for a boy. The class had just gotten settled in their seats when Mr. Nathraichean limped through the door, looking exceedingly sour. His gaze swept the room looking for a likely victim for his bad mood and settled on Harry. Under the unyielding glare, Harry’s new found confidence fizzled like a leaky balloon.

“Essays. Pass them forward.” Mr. Nathraichean demanded quietly.

“Ah... Mister... ‘Krueger’...” he said plucking Harry’s out of the pile and holding up by the corner as if it were contaminated. “I see you managed to spell your name correctly. Had trouble though did you?” He said with a question in his voice noticing the erasures.

The class giggled.

Harry blushed.

“Shall we see how you did on the rest of it?”

The class snickered, they were just glad it wasn’t theirs he had singled out.

Harry just wished there was somewhere he could hide.

Mr. Nathraichean whipped out a ruler and held it up to the paper. “You are short a full four inches... Mister... ‘Kruger’... when I said

one foot that meant twelve full inches of meaningful content... that precludes...spacing... and margins.” He said slowly as if talking to an imbecile.

The class squirmed. They hoped he didn’t measure theirs.

Harry slid down in his seat and scowled. This was not going well, and the day had started out so promising.

“Now shall we see if we can eliminate any of the residual length owing to unfortunate scholastics?” he asked no one in particular.

The class perked up, this might be fun after all!

Harry sighed, he should have figured.

Mr. Nathraichean cleared his throat and started to read...

Saint Patricks Day by Harry Krueger

Saint Patricks day is an Irish holiday in honor of Saint Patrick. Only Saint Patricks name wasn’t really Patrick and he wasn’t really Irish. But he did have a day named after him. His name was Maewyn Succat and he was born in Scotland or Wales a long time ago.

Then some Irish marauders...

Mr. Nathraichean paused with a pained expression on his face before continuing.

...kidnapped him but he couldn’t pay the ransome. But he got lucky and instead of killing him they made him tend there sheep instead. Then one day he got lucky again and escaped and became a monk. When he was a monk the bishop said ‘Maewyn you are a noble man so your monk name will be Patrick which means ‘noble’.

One day some Norsemen came to invade Ireland and they were hungry because they were busy invading so they looked for some toads or snakes to make soup and couldn’t find any so they asked Maewyn who he was and where the toads were and he said ‘My

name is now Patrick and there are not any toads and snakes here'. The Norsemen said 'Oh' and since they didn't speak gaelic they thought he said his name was 'Paudrid' which in their language meant 'expeller of toads' so they decided he must be a powerful wizard and got rid of them by magic so they didn't kill him.

If he hadn't been kidnapped by Irish marauders and gone to Ireland and then escaped and then became a monk and then changed his name to Patrick and then been mistaken by invading Norsemen for a wizard he wouldn't have had a day named after him. But he did, and that's why Saint Patrick's Day is lucky.

Today there are more Irish people in America than anywhere else and they do all sorts of fun things to celebrate like marching in parades, dyeing the Chicago River green, eating lots of corned beef and cabbage, and drinking beer, and the 'wearing of the green'. What that means is that on Saint Patrick's day in America everyone is supposed to wear green even if they're not Irish and if you see someone who is not wearing green you are supposed to pinch them...

All the little girls in the class without a speck of green on gasped and pulled in their elbows. All the little boys snickered and made plans.

... but if you see someone who is wearing green you are supposed to kiss them instead...

All the little girls in the class blushed and giggled, and hurriedly painted their fingernails with green colored markers. All the little boys gasped and went decidedly pale.

I think it would be fun to see a river die green, and to march in a parade, and my mum told me a green jumper to wear today but she already kissed me so I'm good. The fallacy of Saint Patrick's day is that I am too young to drink beer.

"Your penmanship is atrocious, however I do congratulate you that you managed to incorporate the word 'fallacy' into the text, albeit incorrectly spelled, and incorrectly used." Mr. Nathraichean observed with a slight sneer. "For your erudition the word 'fallacy' is a noun

meaning deceptive or false in appearance, in particular as it pertains to flawed logic and incorrect reasoning.”

“So sir... if something looks like one thing but it’s really something else it’s a fallacy?” Harry asked, wondering if that was what Cosmos was... a fallacy.

“As it pertains to logic – and names - that is so.” Mr. Nathraichean responded warming to the subject. “Take your statement, ‘The fallacy of Saint Patrick’s Day is that you are too young to drink beer. While you may disagree with the reasoning that age should be a factor in deciding whether it is right or wrong for you to drink alcohol, it is not a fallacy of either logic, or of Saint Patrick’s Day itself. Instead, it is just an indication that you desire things that are not good for you. While the real fallacy in your essay is the statement that Saint Patrick’s Day is lucky because Maewyn Succat changed his name to Patrick.”

“But he did!” Harry protested.

Mr. Nathraichean glared.

“Oops! Sorry... but he did...Sir.”

“Be that as it may...Mister... ‘Krueger’... there is no such thing as ‘luck’ therefore saying something is ‘lucky’ is by definition a fallacy. Therefore, the last inch of your essay is disqualified. And shall we say one more for your lack of neatness and appalling spelling? You owe me six.”

Harry crossed his arms in front of him and his eyebrows pulled into a frown. It was true he had thrown in that last sentence as an afterthought, but at least he had remembered the essay was supposed to be about the ‘fallacies’ of Saint Patrick’s Day and not just about Saint Patrick. But Mr. Nathraichean had to be wrong! His dad, and his mum, and his Uncle Remmy, and Cosmos, all said that there was such a thing as luck! Just because they just didn’t have any right now, didn’t mean it didn’t exist. Just like money, they didn’t have any of that either, but it certainly did exist because Uncle Vernon wanted it, and Uncle Vernon didn’t believe in anything that wasn’t real, and that he couldn’t see.

“Or maybe... ‘Sir’...” he could use implied verbal air quotes too, Harry thought irritably, “if luck is real, than saying there is no such thing... is the fallacy.”

Merlin! Was he really reduced to mental sparing with a nine-year-old? He felt a headache coming on and his leg was throbbing. It was time to nip this in the bud. “There will be no further discussion on the topic. I am correct...” and as Harry opened his mouth again to protest he added, “... because I am the teacher. Close your mouth or you will owe me seven.”

Harry shut his mouth.

Dudley sniggered – a little too loudly.

“Thank you for reminding me Mister Dursley... you owe me ten.” Mr. Nathraichean said in his silky voice as he towered over the blonde boy cowering in his seat.

“But that’s more than Harry! What did I do? Whatever it was it was Harry’s fault!” Dudley pouted.

“Indeed, however, in this occurrence is more of a matter of what you failed to do, use common sense and restraint. You now owe me eleven. Do you care to try for twelve? Hm? Anyone else? No?”

Dudley shut his mouth.

So did the rest of the class, for the rest of the day, much to Mr. Nathraichean’s total satisfaction.

“So how did it go sweetie?” Lily asked that afternoon as Harry drug through the door and flopped, face down, over the footstool.

“...mmmgregmph!...” came the muffled reply.

“Come sit by me...” Lily invited pulling him off the footstool. “Now what went wrong? Was it Dudley again?”

"No... Dudley stayed away all day, except when we walked home and this time we actually walked. He didn't chase me. I think he wants his BB gun turned back as it was." Harry surmised shrewdly.

"He can want all he wants to, it's not going to happen. But if it wasn't Dudley picking on you - why so glum?"

"It's my teacher... he hates me."

"Hate is a pretty strong word. Why do you think that?"

"I have to write more essay." He groaned.

"Why is that? Didn't he like the one you did last weekend?"

"He said it wasn't long enough. He said you can count spacing and margins, and then he deducted for... for 'unfortunate scholastics'."

Lily laughed at how put out he sounded. She remembered back in her Hogwarts days that her old friend Sev used to say the same thing when they worked on homework together. He had been his own worst critic on his assignments, grading them before the professors even had a chance to look at them.

"Did you do your best? I know you worked on it the better part of Sunday."

"Yes I did... kind of... okay not really..." Harry admitted reluctantly. He had been having so much fun with Cosmos that he really hadn't spent that much time on it. And he hadn't looked up the words he wasn't sure if he was spelling right in the dictionary.

"Then don't you agree with your teacher that perhaps you should do it over?"

"I guess... I better go get started..." Harry said at first dragging his feet towards his bedroom, and then remembering what awaited him, hopped happily the rest of the way instead. Closing his door behind him, he whispered for Cosmos.

“Hey boy! Where are you?” and was wantonly attacked by a very lonely dog.

‘...you were gone all day!... lick!... I woke up and you were gone!... lick!... so I took another nap... lick!... and you were still gone!... lick!... but now you’re back!... lick!... so lets go play!... lick! lick! lick! lick! lick!....’

Giggling from all the attention Harry tumbled on the floor with Cosmos until they both fell into an exhausted heap.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t play today... I have to rewrite my essay on Saint Patrick’s Day. My teacher didn’t like the first one.” Harry told him with big sad eyes.

“Why not?” Cosmos say after transforming back into a man and sitting cross legged on the rug with Harry. “Did you give him the part about the marauders?”

Harry nodded. “He didn’t say anything about that part, he just looked like he ate something bad when he read it, but then he looks like that a lot so I don’t know if it meant anything. But I think what he was really mad about was that I said Saint Patrick’s Day was lucky and he said it wasn’t. ... I guess I shouldn’t have argued.”

“Nonsense! Always stand up for what you believe in.”

“But that just it... I don’t know if I do believe in luck.”

“Hm... well why don’t we put it to the test?”

“How do we do that?” Harry asked with curiosity.

“It’s about time I started helping you with my end of the deal – getting your dad to say ‘yes’ to a dog. Since we are going to need a bit of manipulation... liberally coated with luck... to do that, we’ll just have to make some.”

“Make some? You can make luck?”

“Oh yes indeedy! What you need to make it is all around us. You just have to know where to look for it and to believe.”

“So where do I look?”

“Well wishes are a kind of luck. Do you remember when you said that you made a wish on a birthday candle that I would come, and then I did? Well that was lucky for you because I might have been busy elsewhere.”

“But I don’t have anymore birthday candles.” Harry said sadly.

“But there are other lucky things you can wish on.”

“Like what?”

“When I was young we used to wish on stars. But it has to be a special star or it isn’t lucky.”

“How do you know if it’s a special one?”

“Well there are all kinds of wishing stars. Falling stars are the most popular, but the most special one is the very first star of the evening.”

“What makes it so special? I mean there are lots of stars.”

“That’s why it’s so special... because there are billions and billions of stars, and billions and billions of people. But there is only one first star every night, and only one person can be the first to see it. So it takes a quick eye to see it before it’s joined with all the others stars in the night sky. It only has the power to grant wishes if it’s the only one in the sky when you make your wish, and it’s only that way for a few seconds. It’s so fast that if you blink, you could miss it. And you have to be the first one to see it, before anyone else wishes on it first. Many people just wish on any bright star thinking it will do, but they’re tempting fate, when they do that they usually get bad luck instead. ”

“So how do you wish on it so it’s lucky?”

“There’s an old nursery rhyme...”

“Oh! I know which one you mean. Starlight, Star bright!”

“So you’ve used it before?”

“Nah... but I heard Aunt Petunia teach it to Dudley.”

“Why didn’t you ever say it too?”

“‘cause I couldn’t see the stars from my cupboard. No window.” Harry shrugged.

Cosmos liked this Aunt Petunia less and less.

“Well then it’s time you used it.” Cosmos sat by the window with Harry on his lap, and they watched as twilight slowly claimed the eastern sky. Just as Harry was becoming cross-eyed, from trying not to blink, so that he wouldn’t miss the first star, he caught a twinkle in the corner of his eye.

“I see it! I see it!”

“So be quick! Make your wish.”

Starlight, Star bright
First star I see tonight
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight

“...I wish that Daddy will let me have a dog.” Harry closed his eyes and wished fervently. “Do you – do you think it worked?” He opened one eye and asked Cosmos.

“Maybe, you did a good job of it. So now that we have some luck on our side, you need to add the manipulation factor to help boost its power.”

“How do I do that?”

“With a little thing called reverse psychology. Now there are two ways to do that - you need to either make the other person think that whatever you want is their idea to begin with, or you need to make them think that what you want is the lesser of two evils. You do this by asking for the opposite of what you want... hence the reverse part. Now in your case you want a dog, and they say it's too big, so you have to make it seem not so big.”

“But I tried that already! I tried asking for a puppy instead of a dog, since it was smaller, and it didn't work.” Harry said exasperatedly.

“Ah but parents do have some intelligence, they are parents after all, and they know that small things like little puppies and little boys grow, so what you have to do is play the psychological game...”

“Si-coe-logic-all game?” Harry frowned. “What are the rules?”

“Ah that's the beauty and excitement of psychology, there really are no rules, you have to read every case as unique and different. However they do mostly follow a set pattern of behavior, so if you can read your opponent you can predict the likely outcome of a given set of circumstances.” Cosmos said getting into the subject with glee, “Take your parents for instance... they want to say yes to you, I mean... who wouldn't want to say yes to those eyes, but you have make them believe it's their idea and the lesser of two evils. Now you already have a head start on the ‘it's their idea’ part...”

“I do?”

“Yes, didn't you say they already offered to get you a pet?”

“Yeah,” Harry snorted, “some dumb ol' cat.”

“Well see? So a pet is not out of the question, it is now just a matter of what kind.”

“I want a dog. I want you.” Harry said firmly.

“Well then that works out well,” Cosmos chuckled, “because you’re stuck with me. But what we need to do is make your parents agree as well that a dog is a fine choice.”

“But HOW?” Harry was starting to be frustrated beyond his limits.

“By making a dog a much better choice than anything else. Now to address the lesser of two evils aspect, the first thing we should address is size, as that seems to be a major stumbling block. Now as you noted before, asking for something smaller that would eventually be the same size didn’t work, so you need to ask for something that’s larger to start with that will grow even bigger with time.”

“Like what?”

“Let’s see... is there anything that that cousin of your’s wanted that your aunt and uncle said no to because of its size?”

“They don’t say no to Dudley at all. Wait a minute, Dudley did ask for a pony once... he didn’t get it, but they did give him riding lessons. I know because they had a picture of him on the pony hanging on the wall. The pony didn’t look very happy.”

“That’s just the ticket! Ponies are bigger than dogs and they grow into horses... well if they’re foals they do, ponies really don’t. They’re just naturally small. But that’s a common misconception so we can work with it. Go on... go ask him for one! Ask him for a pony!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah! Yeah! It’s a perfect place to start. Go on! Go on!” Cosmos urged him out the door.

“Er... Daddy?” Harry asked coming up timidly beside him.

“Yes Son?”

“Can I – canIhavea pony?” he finished in a rush of words.

“No Son.” James replied without even having to think about it.

“Okay Daddy.” Harry said and slunk back to his room with his head down.

“He said ‘NO’.” Harry said reproachfully.

“That’s okay. I thought he would.”

“Then whyyyy did you make me ask him?”

“Just ‘cause.”

“Oh.”

“Don’t worry we’re not done yet. But you best get to work on that essay while I think up our next step.” Cosmos told him as he opened the window again. “I do my best thinking in wide open spaces so I’m going out for a bit. Don’t wait up.” He said and transformed back into his animagus form as he jumped over the sill, landing quietly in the alley on all fours. Time to make his own wish. Now that he had found Harry, he wanted to start searching for Remus. He had a little payback coming for leaving him in Azkaban, the dirty rotten git. Cosmos had had a lot of time to think in between his naps, now that his thoughts weren’t being clouded by the dementors, and the more he thought about it the more he wanted revenge for being betrayed.

One floor down, Remus was making a wish of his own on the thin stream of light that pierced his cement prison through the cracks between the boards sealing his window tight.

Moonlight, Night light
I ask you for some respite
And from your power wish requite
To help me through till mornings light

He felt a pang in his heart as he recited it. It was just a stupid little rhyme that his childhood friend Sirius had made up for him. Sirius, gods how he missed him, he loved him more than almost anyone on the face of the earth and he had failed him the most as well. Since that night when Voldemort attacked, he had made one mistake after

another. He had made all the wrong choices, and his friends had had to pay for it. James, Lily, and Harry had all forgiven him, but with Sirius dead, he would never find true solace. Remus turned over and pulled the pillow over his head to block out the shaft of moonlight that pierced his heart. He just wished that Sirius was still alive somewhere.

One floor up, Lily and James sat cuddled on the comfy couch with Holly and watched out the window as the western sky darkened to match it's other half.

"I had to say no again."

"You did? So he still wants a puppy?"

"Nope. Pony this time. Don't know what he's thinking. If we don't have room for a dog, we sure don't have room for a horse."

"I wouldn't worry about it." Lily said, "It's probably just one of those phases we read about. He'll forget about it soon enough."

"I wish."

"So do I... hey look!" Lily said sitting up and pointing out the window. "The first star!" She closed her eyes and started to chant...

Starlight, Star bright
The first star to rise tonight
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have those I love within my sight

"From your mouth to god's ear." James said lovingly and they snuggled back down, not noticing the dark shape running swiftly past their window and down the pavement across from their flat.

One floor up, Dudley pouted as his mother made him rewrite the essay she had written for him over in his own hand. "Do I haf' to Daddy? Can't you just make Mummy write it so it looks like I did it?"

"Nonsense Dudders, its good penmanship practice for you. If you want to succeed in business you must have good penmanship." His

father answered, "And if you do well, maybe I'll get you a new BB gun next weekend and not make you wait for your birthday."

"Really?" Dudley perked up and started writing with more enthusiasm.

"I thought you were going to make those freaks fix his old one." Petunia reminded him.

"I threw it out, it was infected by all that m-ma- all that freaky stuff. And I've seen first hand that anything that touches is contaminated. Didn't want it anywhere near our little tyke."

"So wouldn't that be true of any money we got from them too?" Petunia asked puzzled at this logic.

"Codswallop! Money's money." Vernon replied burying his nose in the London Times and effectively ending the conversation.

Seeing that Dudley was done copying his essay, Petunia took him into the bedroom to tuck him in.

"Diddydums, I'm sorry this flat is so small that there isn't a play room for you." Petunia said as he climbed into bed.

"But it won't be forever right?" Dudley asked. "And I will get my telly and computer back won't I?"

"Of course my precious boy."

"When?" He asked petulantly. "It's been weeks and weeks now and I'm getting bored. I wish I had them now."

"It should be soon. Why don't you wish for it?" she asked going to the window and looking out at the starry sky. "There are a lot of stars out tonight."

"I thought that only worked on the first star." Dudley said doubtfully.

"Now, now, now... my baby angel should have all the wishes he wants!" Petunia simpered. "Come to the window and wish with me."

Starlight, Star bright
All the stars we see tonight
We wish we may, We wish we might
Have all the wishes we wish tonight

Petunia and Dudley sat in the window and made wishes well into the night, wishing for every possession they could think of, on every star they saw. They even wished on a few twice, but never once looked down or they might have noticed the building once again being keenly observed.

It was two very tired boys who handed in their essays the next day, as despite Cosmos's cheerful instructions not to wait up for him, Harry had done that very thing. He just couldn't fall asleep until he knew Cosmos was under his bed keeping the rabid toe-eating dust bunnies at bay. Stifling a wide yawn, he dropped the essay on Mr. Nathraichean's desk as he entered the classroom.

"So Mister... 'Krueger'... am I to assume that you have produced six inches of quality research?"

"Yes sir." He nodded sleepily.

"Hm... we shall see." He said looking down his nose at him before he began reading.

The Fallacy of Saint Patrick's Day by Harry Krueger

"At least you spelled it correctly this time." He said begrudgingly.

Some people say Saint Patrick's Day isn't lucky because they say there is no such thing as luck and they say if you say it is then it is a fallacy but if luck really did exist then that wouldn't be true and it wouldn't be a fallacy because fallacy is a noun that means deceptive and if it isn't deceptive then it isn't a fallacy.

There are many things that prove luck exists like stars. One of these is wishing on falling stars, and another is wishing on the first star to appear each night. If you see the star first before anyone else sees it

first and you say the right words you will get your wish. If it doesn't come true it just means someone else wished first. So this proves that luck does exist because someone somewhere got their wish granted and that is a lucky thing for them. And since luck does exist it is a fallacy to say Saint Patrick's Day isn't lucky.

Mr. Nathraichean looked at the class over the top of the paper. Every one of the twenty two heads were nodding in agreement to the claim.

"Fallacy can also be used as an adverb, fallaciousness: meaning to use guile or trickery in an attempt to deceive. As an example: claiming that this... essay... was quality work in the hopes that I would not indulge in actually trying to read it was an act of fallaciousness. You may write me another three. No, make that four, as you are still an inch short and there is a decided lack of proper grammar and punctuation. Neatness counts, messiness doesn't."

"What!" Harry exclaimed wanting to protest. He knew it was long enough!

"Since you are so fond of using nursery rhymes as erroneous arguments, let me put it to you this way so that you might understand..."

Day bright, Sun bright
Only fools stay up all night
As what they write is very trite
So again you will rewrite

"Guess you're not so lucky after all, are you Mister... 'Krueger'?" Mr. Nathraichean smirked, as did Dudley when the teacher just marked A+ on his and handed it back without even measuring it.

"Did it go any better today?" Lily asked as Harry drug in for the second day in a row and assumed his martyr position on the footstool. "Hm... I guess not. What was it this time?"

"He said it wasn't long enough again. But it was! I measured it three times!"

“Was that all? Maybe I better talk to him...”

“No... it’s okay.” Harry said sighing. “He said some other stuff too, but I didn’t understand what it all was, except the part where he said I didn’t punctuate enough and it was messy. I guess I deserve it...”

“Then I guess you better do it again like he requested.” Lily agreed.

“Okay. But do you know anything else lucky I could write about? I’m about out of ideas.”

“Well... your sister is sleeping through the night a month ahead of schedule. I call that lucky.”

“It is?”

“Yes, the last few nights, I haven’t heard a peep out of her. It’s been nice to get a full night’s rest. I feel so much better. I know your dad is a lot less edgy too.”

Harry grinned. He knew why they hadn’t heard Holly. Cosmos had been keeping her changed and entertained every night, so that they wouldn’t come in and find him. Having a dog was great!

“But I don’t think that is something my teacher would think was lucky.”

“If he’s a bachelor, probably not. If he was a father, he would know how lucky it truly is.” Lily laughed. “Let’s see what did you write about last time?”

“Wishing on falling stars and the first star at night.”

“Well... there are other things you can wish on like finding dropped coins and four-leaf clovers. They’re lucky too,” she said quoting...

‘See a penny, pick it up
All day long you’ll have good luck’

“Okay I’ll try that.” Harry said as he retired to his room to try the essay for the third time, only to be distracted once again by his playful pup.

Cosmos did seem to need his attention... and Mr. Nathraichean... well he had till tomorrow before he had to worry about him again.

“Okay are you ready?” Cosmos asked after coaching Harry through several hours of ‘puppy-dog-eyes’ training in front of the mirror. “This time we need to up the ante a bit as it were.”

“Up the ante?”

“Yeah... need to make it... ah... even ‘bigger’ than a pony. And it should be something more... um... ‘exotic!’”

“Exotic?”

“Yeah... you know... something you see in a zoo.”

“Are you sure?” Harry asked doubtfully.

“Yeah! Go on now! Shoo! Go ask! And don’t forget the eyes!” He said pointing at his own.

“Okay...” Harry said before he left, closing the door behind him. Taking a deep breath, and blinking real hard until his eyes watered up a bit, he tentatively tip-toed over to his dad and patted him on the arm to get his attention.

“Er... Daddy?”

“Yes Son?”

“Can I –can I have an- an elephant?”

“The gigantic thing with tusks?”

Harry nodded.

“No...” James said pausing slightly this time. “I don’t think so son.”

“Okay Daddy.” Harry said sadly looking at him with the biggest, wettest, green eyes imaginable before dolefully heading back to his

room, making sure to hang his head and slump his shoulders as Cosmos had shown him.

As soon as he got inside, he turned to Cosmos who had been hiding behind the door and told him, "He said no again."

"That's okay. Not a problem... did he take longer to think about it at least?"

"Noooo... but he did use more words."

"Well, that's all right then."

"It is?" Harry said incredulously.

"Completely."

With his long legs dangling off the end of the bed, and using Harry's stuffed animal as a pillow, Cosmos stretched out and shot essay suggestions at him while he tried again to finish the assignment. While in the other room, James and Lily discussed his latest plea.

"An elephant. He asked for an elephant Lily. Now that is not moving in the right direction at all."

"Are you sure he meant a real one?"

"Yes, tusks and all. I'm beginning to think this isn't a phase."

"Maybe..." Lily said snuggling Holly down in between them. "Maybe we could get him a stuffed dog."

"I got him a stuffed stag." James pointed out jealously.

"I know and it is a beautiful stag honey, but maybe a dog too? He doesn't have that many toys. Another wouldn't spoil him."

'...goo... ga... kama!... kama!...' Holly gurgled putting in her two cents worth. Her big brother wanted a dog and so did she... Cosmos!

“That’s ‘da-da’ not ‘ka-ma’... c’mon you’re so close! Say it now... da... da...” James said hopefully.

“Your jealous streak is showing. You’re thinking of Sirius aren’t you?”

“Yeah... and I know I shouldn’t be... and don’t get me wrong I’d give anything for him to be around giving me grief again.” He said with a sad laugh, “You know, I bet he literally spent days teaching Harry to say ‘pa-foo’ as his first word instead of ‘dada’.”

“It was pretty funny. You should have seen your face when he did it. It was priceless.” Lily laughed at the glum look on his face.

“Quit laughing.”

“Yes dear.”

Wednesday morning Harry left with an essay he was positive Mr. Nathraichean would like. The coin idea had been good, but it was his mum’s suggestion of writing about four-leaf clovers reminded him that his teacher had shown a great deal of interest in plants, and had mentioned flora and fauna in regards to Saint Patrick’s Day. He was sure he had a winner this time and handed it in proudly. This time he didn’t even mind knowing that he was sure to read it out loud again to try and ridicule him.

“So Mister... ‘Krueger’... Am I to assume from the look on your face that you believe that you have now managed to fashion an acceptable essay? ”

“Yes sir.” He nodded as he took his seat. He had put in lots of extra words at Cosmos prodding to make it extra long, and had looked them all up in the dictionary just to be sure they were spelled right. He had even written it in cursive so it would be neater, even if it did take longer.

“We shall see... we shall see...”

The Lucky Flora of Saint Patrick’s Day by Harry Krueger

“Still feeling ‘lucky’ are we?” Mr. Nathraichean didn’t seem pleased with the title.

The shamrock is the flora symbol of Saint Patrick’s Day, because Saint Patrick used it when he was a monk to teach about his church. But another flora symbol is the lucky four-leaf clover. If you find a four-leaf clover it is very very lucky because they are hard to find because they are really really rare. Each leaf stands for something lucky. The first is for hope, the second is for faith, the third is for love and the fourth is for luck. So as you can see, if you search for a four-leaf clover and find one it is very lucky and not a fallacy at all.

“So... you consider a ‘Trifolium repens Quadrifolium’ to be... lucky?”

“No... a four-leaf clover.”

‘That is what I said, a four-leaf clover.’

“No you didn’t.” Harry replied argumentatively under his breath. He didn’t want to have his essay marked down again, and from the look on his teacher’s face it was about to be.

“I always thought a four-leaf clover was lucky too.” Dudley waved his hand and piped up, miraculously agreeing with Harry on this one. However, Harry wouldn’t have been so grateful for his cousin’s backup, if he had know Dudley’s ulterior motive was just to keep the teacher riled up. He liked seeing Harry in trouble. “Don’t you Mr. Nathraichean?”

“I think nothing of the sort Mister Dursley. Let us dissect Mister ...’Krueger’s’... argument...” Mr. Nathraichean said peering down his long hooked nose at Harry.

Harry thought Mr. Nathraichean looked more as if what he really wanted to do was to dissect him instead.

“Point one... you claim that when a clover has four leaves instead of the customary three it is lucky. A four-leaf clover is merely an

aberration of nature caused by a somatic mutation. If you had three arms instead of two, would you consider it... lucky?"

"I guess not..." Harry slouched in his seat.

"Point two... you further claim looking for a four-leaf clover and finding it is lucky. It would seem the very action of 'looking' for it negates the 'luck' quotient if 'found', as the term 'luck' refers to chance and happenstance, rather than a planned occurrence. Would you not agree?"

"I guess so..." Harry slouched further.

"So what do we have here?" he asked dangling the offending essay in front of Harry.

"Another fallacy?"

"Quite so, Mister... 'Krueger'... Since you had the foresight to make it five inches instead of the required four, to be fair I shall give you extra credit for that..." Harry sat up relieved until he heard the fateful words, "...then deducting fifty percent for extraneous words and pure idiocy, you only owe me two and a half more."

Harry turned red.

Dudley snorted with glee.

"Was school any better today sweetie?" Lily asked him with a smile as she took fresh hot biscuits out of the oven. "Holly and I made them four-leaf clover shaped, in honor of you finishing your essay."

"Better not let me have any then, I didn't finish." Harry said morosely. "Besides I don't think I can look at a four-leaf clover anymore without thinking about it being a mutant."

"Why? What happened?" Lily said sitting down with him at the table.

"Mum? Do you think that sometimes there are just some things you can't do?"

“Like what?”

“Like making my teacher happy. I have to write it again.”

“He didn’t like any of it?”

“Well... I am down to just two and a half inches.”

“Do you need any more ideas? I’d be happy to help you when I finish feeding snicklefritz here.” She said sympathetically.

“No, I’ll go ask Cos... um... my cousin... that’s it. I’ll go ask Dudley, his essay already passed.”

“Are you two are getting along better now?” Lily asked pleased. “Maybe we should have him over for supper tonight.”

“...uh... maybe not tonight... I do have to write my essay again. But I’ll take him some biscuits.” Harry said quickly, grabbing the plate before he ran to his room.

“But isn’t...” Lily stopped as the bedroom door slammed behind him, so she finished her thought to Holly instead. “...Dudley upstairs? You have a very silly brother. Yes you do! Now how about saying ‘mama’ for me? Hm?...ma....ma....?”

Harry breathed a sigh of relief as he leaned with his back against the door. Dodged another bullet!

“Is that homemade sugar biscuits in your hand?” Cosmos said sniffing deeply and liberating the plate from Harry. “I’ve been going spare smelling those for the past hour! Your mum is a cruel, cruel woman. So tell me...” Cosmos asked between bites “...how’d the essay go over?”

“Not so good, he called it idiotic and I have to do another one.”

“If he said that – then he’s a git! Cosmos said frowning and thinking hard. “Maybe we should have used more words.”

"I don't think it would have helped." Harry sighed.

"Do that again!"

"Do what?"

"Sigh."

"Why?"

"I think it's what we've been missing."

"Missing?"

"Yeah, from our 'get-your-dad-to-say-yes' equation. But it needs a little work, doesn't sound quite pitiful enough.

After several hours of sigh practice Cosmos decided his protégé was ready.

"Okay, I think we have the size issue pretty well nailed down. A dog has to be starting to look pretty small in comparison by now. So now we need to start addressing the alternate pet being a better choice issue."

"How do we do that?"

"Tell me again. What kind of pets did they say might be acceptable?"

"They said maybe a cat or a bird." Harry neglected to mention the kneazle, toad, and pygmy puff suggestions. He just couldn't imagine cuddling up with a toad, and he had no idea what a kneazle was. A pygmy puff did at least sound soft and cuddly...but for a pet? His aunt used to have a powder puff that Dudley had once used as a marker for first base. When he put it back in the jar of powder, it had more dirt clinging to it than powder and Harry had gotten blamed when his aunt broke out in an allergic rash. So all in all, the idea of a puff for pet wasn't terribly appealing.

“Okay we can work with that. A cat... hm.... so what we need is a cat that is large and somewhat inappropriate for a nine-year-old...”

“Like what?”

“Well... tigers are cats... LARGE cats and I would classify them as somewhat inappropriate for a pet.”

“Yeah!” Harry ginned in agreement. “They have teeth.”

“Yes they do. Quite sharp ones. I think they’ll do nicely. Now go ask him. Remember to point out it’s a cat, and don’t forget the big sigh this time. Oh and slump your shoulders. Remember? Like we practiced!”

“Okay... but it had better work this time.” Harry warned him as he scampered out of the room.

“Er... Daddy?”

“Yes Son?”

“Can I – can I have a tiger?”

“Um... a tiger?” James asked a bit startled. These pet requests were starting to get a bit out of hand, instead of more and more reasonable, they were getting more and more outlandish.

“A tiger is a cat, isn’t it? And you and Mummy did say maybe a cat.” Harry pointed out reasonably, quite proud of the fact that he was catching on to this psychological game. Cosmos was right, it was kind of fun.

“True we did... however a tiger isn’t quite what we had in mind, so it is still a ‘no’.

“Okay Daddy.” Harry sighed as loudly and as pitifully as he could, and added a second for good measure as he closed his door.

“He said no again.” He reported glumly.

"That was expected, you forgot to slump. But did he offer anything in return yet?"

"No, he just said 'no', that a tiger wasn't what they had in mind."

"Hm... he's a little more difficult and stubborn than I imagined, sort of like your teacher. But still okay, it'll just take a bit more time, but we're wearing him down."

"We are?"

"Without a doubt, my boy. Without a doubt. Now about that essay..."

Thursday morning rolled in along with new thunder clouds dotting the horizon. As James walked Harry and Dudley to school, he kept thinking about Remus. He had seen him up and about for the past three nights, skulking in the alley behind the building. But every time he went out to talk to him, he had disappeared before he got there. Remus was always antisocial during this time of the month, but blast it all, the man needed to get a hold of himself! They were running out of time, Gringotts wasn't open on the weekends, that just gave them today and tomorrow. James was not a patient man, he wanted action, and he wanted it now. He was so antsy about it that Lily had promised to try and coax Remus up for supper that night, and failing that to see if she could get more time out of Vernon.

"You boy's have a good day." James told them as he dropped them off. "And Harry..." he paused and drew the little boy back to him. "...I realize you've been having problems with your teacher, but give him a chance. It's been my experience that any teacher that is willing to pay that much attention to you, and who wants help you improve, is a good teacher, whether his style of teaching is to your liking or not. Keep that in mind and try to learn what he has to teach okay?"

"Okay Daddy. I'll try." Harry promised hugging him goodbye and running after Dudley. Today was going to be different anyway he thought optimistically. He was sure to get a good mark this time. He had left out most of the extra words that Cosmos had kept trying to put in, and he had a show and tell item to go with it.

“So Mister... ‘Krueger’... here we are once again.” Mr. Nathraichean said tenting his hands after reading the essay and heaving a sigh to rival that of Harry’s, much to the delight of the class who was in the mood for a bit of light entertainment on such a gloomy morning. “And once again you have committed a crime against literature. Shall we review the evidence?”

The Lucky Fauna of Saint Patrick’s Day by Harry Krueger

“Ah, again with the ‘luck’ theme...” Mr. Nathraichean glowered.

The class giggled.

“But this time it’s about the fauna instead of the flora.” Harry pointed out proud that he figured out what the words meant.

“Indeed, as your creative title suggests.” He said starting to read again...

Another lucky thing about Saint Patrick’s Day is rabbit’s feet and since a rabbit is an animal and animals are fauna that makes rabbit feet lucky fauna of Saint Patrick’s Day. Rabbit feet are mostly lucky in America but that is okay because a lot of Irish people live there as I said before. They also have a lot of rabbits. They say if you carry a rabbit’s foot in your pocket and you rub it that you will be lucky when you gamble. And if you gamble with a lucky coin you picked up you will be twice as lucky.

“My, my, Mister... ‘Krueger’... is that so?”

Harry nodded ‘yes’ and started to take the rabbit’s foot in his pocket. He didn’t know where Cosmos had gotten it, but this morning he had found the gaudy orange-dyed furry keychain on his book bag. He had brought it to show the class, but as Mr. Nathraichean didn’t seem any happier with his essay, he decided that maybe he needed to keep all the luck to himself, so he shoved it back in his pocket.

“What is that you just secreted in your pocket?” Mr. Nathraichean asked suspiciously approaching his desk and hold out his hand.

“Nuthin’...” Harry hedged, backing away until he hit the front of the desk behind him.

“Nothing? Then you won’t mind showing it to me.”

Harry reluctantly pulled the rabbit’s foot out of his pocket and handed it over.

“The severed limb of a leporidae lagomorpha... dyed florescent orange, how quaint. To illustrate your essay no doubt.”

Harry nodded miserably.

“Do you understand the true lore behind the superstition of the rabbit’s foot?”

“...not really...” Harry answered quietly Remus and Cosmos had both been a little sketchy on the details.

“Then let me educate you, the charm, such as the one you hold, is made only from the left hind foot of a rabbit that was snared in a cemetery during the dark of the moon. It was believed that cemetery rabbits were actually transformed witches, and that by taking their foot you were taking their power. As the new vessel of this power, the rabbit’s foot is reputed to protect the holder from dark magic.” Mr. Nathraichean bent his head down until it was even with Harry’s and continued his lecture in a low, silky, almost hypnotizing voice.

“To make it truly ‘lucky’ it is severed while the rabbit is still alive. Tell me, would you consider it ‘lucky’ if I dragged you to a cemetery, tied you up so you could not squirm away, and then... .?” He asked dropping the charm back into Harry’s hand.

“No Sir!” He mouthed silent horror, dropping the rabbit’s foot as if it had burned him. He would have to check when he got home to make sure his mum still had her left foot! He couldn’t remember seeing her standing this morning. She was just sitting on the couch feeding Holly

when he left. Maybe she couldn't stand! Maybe that's where the rabbit's foot came from!

"Tell me Mister... 'Krueger'... what is this infernal fascination you have with 'luck'?"

"I don't know what you mean sir." Harry answered, more frightened now of what he might find when he got home, than he was of his teacher.

"No doubt, since I used words of more than one syllable." He retorted dryly. "I am asking you to explain why you are so passionate to find 'luck'. Are you not aware by now that there is no such thing? It is only by hard work and effort that anything truly meaningful is achieved. The cosmic ramifications of one person 'finding' luck means that it is taken away from someone else, such as the unfortunate rabbit that lost its foot or the true owner of the coin, who may very well go hungry now because of its lack. Do you understand yet what I have been trying to teach you?"

"I- I guess so."

"Good. Then shall we call it an even inch you still owe me? Oh, and Mister... 'Krueger'... you should take heed of my warning."

"Warning?"

"Stay out of graveyards."

The entire class was quiet, other than a sliding sound as the charm was kicked along the floor from one child to the other, as if in a large pinball game, until it ended up in the pocket of Dudley Dursley. The rest of the day couldn't pass quickly enough for Harry, and like all bad things, it took its own sweet time about ending, but as soon as the final bell rang, Harry practically flew home.

"What's going on?" Lily asked as Harry rushed in, fell to his knees, and hugged her around the ankles.

"I'm just happy you have two feet." He said gratefully.

“And what brought this on? Was there some doubt that I would?” Lily laughed pulling him up into a hug.

“Not – not really. I just needed to check.”

“Let me assure you I do, one right and one left. So how did the essay go today?”

“Down to one inch.”

“My... your teacher is rather exacting isn't he?”

“Uh-huh, but I finally know what to write that will make him happy.”

“Then why don't you go get that behind you. And then if you would please tidy up your room and come back and set the table, I would appreciate it. You're dad's going to be home early and Vernon, Petunia and Dudley and coming for dinner, and hopefully Remus. It's going to be a regular family meal.” She said fiercely and with a look of determination in her flashing eyes.

“Okay Mum... I'll be right back.” Harry agreed, trying to hide his trepidation at the guest list. With a shudder at the thought of what was to come, he went to his room where he found Cosmos taking a late afternoon nap in his customary spot under the bed. In addition to wall-papering the underside of the bunk, on his nightly foraging he had also appropriated the comfy sofa pillow and the soft blanket that was usually tossed across its back. Harry reached under and scratched behind his ears to receive a happy tail wagging greeting in reciprocation.

“So did the treacherous old bleeder like it? And did you find my present?” Cosmos asked coming out from under the bed and stretching his limbs. Every day had had been feeling stronger and more alive.

“He didn't, and yes I did thank you, but it got me into trouble.” Harry said a bit annoyed, flumping down on his desk chair and crossing his arms.

“Oh don’t be like that kiddo,” Cosmos teased, “So what didn’t he like this time?”

“All of it, but at least I only have an inch to go. I thought he might toss the whole thing out, but he didn’t.”

“You’re probably wearing him down enough that he just wants to get it over too.” Cosmos observed wisely. “Speaking of wearing people down with persistence... we need to ask your dad the next question. And this time we need to ask him for something a bit more... ah... dangerous!”

“Really?”

“Yeah... we already did something with teeth, so this time, how about something with horns?”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Yes! Smashing! Okay go on now!”

“But he’ll just say no again.” Harry protested. He really didn’t see where all this psycho business was getting him anywhere.

“That’s what we want.” Cosmos assured him.

“It is?”

“Oh absolutely. Wouldn’t be a good dad if he just nonchalantly said ‘yes’ to a vicious beast as a pet would he be?”

“...um... no?”

“Right! So go ask!”

Harry looked crossly at Cosmos. He was beginning to wonder if having a dog was worth it. But taking another look at his hopeful eyes, he decided to give it one more chance.

“Er... Daddy?”

“Yes Son?”

“Can I have a- a rhinoceros?” It was the biggest thing he could think of that had a horn. He had seen one once at the London Zoo.

“A rhinoceros? Ah... that’s still a ‘no’ Son.” James said looking over his paper as his son’s big sad eyes. A puppy was looking more reasonable all the time... maybe he ought to talk to Lily about it...

“Okay Daddy.” And he dutifully trooped back to report to Cosmos.

“Okay... he said no. Now what?”

“You forgot to sigh! And where were the hung head and the shoulder slump? What good was all that practicing if you don’t do it?”

“I’m sorry Cosmos.”

“That’s okay. He’s just about ready anyway. Just one more and then we’ll ask him the real question. Trust me?”

“I think so... are you sure he won’t get mad?”

“Nah... well... probably not... at least I hope not....”

“He better not, or I’m telling Mummy you made me!”

“Ooo let’s not get her involved.”

“Harry? Table?” Lily called out loudly from the other room.

“Oh no! That’s mum... I forgot. I have to set the table. My aunt and uncle and cousin are coming for supper tonight. Maybe - maybe you better go out while they’re here. Dudley is awfully nosy.”

“Okay kiddo. I better go find myself something to eat then. With that elephant of a cousin of yours coming, there probably won’t be leftovers. See you later.” Cosmos said springing over the windowsill

and into the alley. As Harry stood by the window and watched him disappear around the corner in a loping trot, he had a small pang of doubt if he would really come back. People left him all the time. With a lump in his throat, he pushed down the thought. Cosmos would come back, he had every time so far, and this time it was his idea to have him go. It was just that he missed him already, and he hadn't been gone but a minute. Carefully fingering the smooth leather band he had in his pocket, he felt glad again, and decided that he would give it to Cosmos after school on Friday, as a present for their one week anniversary.

"Harry!" Harry stopped wool-gathering when he heard his mum call him the second time, and quickly straightening his spread, and neaten the room he hurried out to set the table.

Eight plates - check, eight cups - check, eight sets of silverware - check, eight napkins - check, and eight chairs of various sizes - check, Harry counted as he studiously set the table.

"Um... why eight?" James asked coming up behind him and critiquing his work. "Holly doesn't use silverware yet. And she has a high chair. Don't make her grow up too fast." He teased.

"Oh that's right, I forgot the highchair." Harry said as he drug it over too. There, now there were nine.

"Still... I think you have an extra place set don't you?"

"No nine that's right - Uncle Remmy, Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, Dudley, you, Mummy, Holly, Me and Cos-" Harry stopped counting on his fingers in mid sentence. "Oh, you're right. I guess I was counting my cousin twice."

"He does eat a lot, but let's not encourage it." James said taking one of the place settings away just as the bell rang.

"Get that okay?"

Harry knew it was his upstairs uncle ringing the bell, because his downstairs uncle had a key. He wasn't looking forward to this. He had

heard Uncle Vernon scream and yell a lot through the walls over the past months, but he had carefully avoided actually coming face to face with him since that time right before Christmas when he had locked him in his cupboard and then left him there.

Harry still had nightmares of Uncle Vernon's red face as he told him that there was no such thing as magic, and that he was going to lock him in until all that tommyrot was out of his head once and for all, no matter how long it took. Harry had known his uncle had meant it too. That was one of Harry's worst fears, being locked in and forgotten. He used to have nightmares almost every night that he was back in his cupboard, but this past week, with Cosmos guarding him he hadn't had a one. Cosmos seemed to understand his fear like no one else did.

Squaring his shoulders and took a deep breath and opened the door.

"It's about time!" his uncle growled pushing past him and claiming the most comfortable chair. "It isn't decent to keep us waiting like common riff-raff."

Harry bowed his head and just stepped quickly out of the way.

Uncle Vernon was followed closely by Aunt Petunia who merely sniffed at Harry and told him he smelled like wet dog.

This made Harry smile knowingly, much to the disgust of his aunt. His aunt had told him that often just to be mean, even though he kept himself and his clothes clean, but this time she was probably right.

Last was Dudley who trailed in reluctantly behind his parents. He knew his Auntie was still miffed at him for the BB gun incident and he was equally miffed at her, because she had turned his gun into a water pistol, one that leaked so his dad threw it out. If it hadn't been for his own mum's horrible cooking, he would have stayed behind, he thought irritably, shoving Harry into the wall as he past by.

"Supper's about ready." Lily called in from the kitchen, her voice carried in on the succulent aroma of roast beef. James had brought a particularly nice big cut back from the grocery and she had been sure

to cut off a portion of it when it was still blood rare for Remus, then left one portion in extra long for her sister Petunia who like everything well-done, the rest was a nice balance of medium pink. Lily was hoping that a good meal would put them all in the mood to be more reasonable.

Harry knew what his mum was planning and shook his head at her efforts. He had lived with them for a long time. They were never reasonable.

“Hey kiddo!” Remus said ruffling his hair as he stepped through the door. “What smells so good?”

Harry glowed at the welcome. He just realized that Cosmos called him ‘kiddo’ too, in the same identical way, teasing and affectionate at the same time. He couldn’t wait until he would be able to introduce his favorite uncle to his favorite dog.

“You made it! And we’re having roast beef. Mum saved a rare part just for you in case you could come.” Harry smiled, taking his hand and leading him into the table where the rest were already seated. “I set a place for you right by me.”

Remus chuckled as he noticed Harry’s writing on the place cards directing everyone where to sit, and he could only imagine that it was also Harry who had made up the odd seating arrangement. On one long side, Harry had seated James on the left and Remus on the right with himself and his mum and Holly’s high chair sandwiched in the middle between them. Directly across from him, he had seated his cousin on a side to himself, which left his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon at either end.

Remus had noticed that Harry’s body language was very guarded, and thought the seating arrangement was his way of protecting himself from the intrusion of the upstairs relatives, until Petunia spoke up.

“I see you haven’t entirely let the boy forget the manners I trained into him,” Petunia said with her nose held high. “At least he still knows to seat the important people at the head of the table, and to keep my

lckly Diddykins as far away from the undesirable elements as possible.”

Remus raised his eyebrows in surprise when neither Lily nor James said anything to that, and then he looked at Harry, who just flushed and ducked his head at his aunt’s implied slam.

“Of course you should have the seats of honor,” Lily placated her sister with a smile as she started to pass the jacket potatoes. “We’re delighted to have you here, after all you are family.”

“Don’t act much like it.” Vernon growled stabbing a more than liberal portion of beef off the server. “No respect at all. You would have us twiddling away our days just sitting on our heels, while you lot muck about with a lot of codswallop and taradiddle.”

At his angry voice, so loud and so close, Harry startled and in doing so upset his milk. Remus started to take out his wand to spell it clean only to be stopped by a look from Lily and a negative shake of the head from James. Puzzled he slid his wand back in his pocket.

“Clumsy!” Aunt Petunia admonished Harry sternly, before sliding the last two plump potatoes onto Dudley’s plate, his own and the one meant for Harry. “You don’t mind do you Lily? My sweetums has been so peckish lately.”

“Well I...” Lily frowned and started to reply as she wiped up the spill and poured Harry some more milk, but was cut off by Petunia as Dudley turned a sorrowful face to his mum, and once she looked away, grinned at Harry and kicked him under the table, causing him to upset his milk again.

“You really should just switch the boy to water Lily,” Petunia said with disapproval, “that’s what I had to do, otherwise he just wasteful.”

“Wait just a minute now...” James started to protest just to be cut off by Vernon. James saw what Dudley had done, and had no doubt it wasn’t the first time, the little bully.

“Yes the little tyke has been off his feed lately, practically wasting away to skin and bone.” Vernon agreed helping himself to the rest of the meat on the server, and splitting it with Dudley, “I blame it all on you. Traumatizing him with all that ma-ma- tommyrot business.”

Dudley smirked as he stuffed his face and kicked Harry again.

Then Vernon and Petunia launched into a seemingly never ending rant, criticizing everything under the sun, never letting James and Lily slip in more than a ‘er’ or a ‘um’, until Remus, still a bit edgy from his recent transformation, finally had enough. He didn’t understand why they were letting the nasty trio harass them and their children like that. Didn’t they see the effect it was having on Harry? Right before his eyes, he was reverting into the pale silent child that he had first met in January. This wasn’t good.

“SILENCE!” Remus thundered in his loudest you-will-do-as-I-say teacher voice, whipping out his wand as he rose and stared down Vernon and Petunia, whose mouths hung open in shock and fear, but finally no noise was coming out of them. “You are supposed to be family! James and Lily are two of the nicest, giving, and loving people you will ever meet, and Harry is one of the sweetest boys I have ever had the privilege to teach. You’re family! And yet you are treating them as if they have the plague! What is the matter with you?”

“Those...those...’people’...” Vernon sputtered as he fished out the florescent rabbit’s foot that Dudley had given him, and then waving it at James and Lily declared, “ARE NOT MY FAMILY!”

“And thank the gods for that!” James retorted only to be held back by Lily, but he shook off her hand angrily. “No Lily, Vernon’s right. We aren’t now, and never will be, ‘family’ to them. I’m tired of biting my tongue while they harangue my family. I want them out of my home. NOW.”

“But what about pudding?” Dudley wailed.

“Sorry Dudley, there is no pudding for you.” Lily said rising and starting to clear off the dishes with tears in her eyes. All her best laid plans ruined like the dinner. Yesterday at tea she thought she was

finally getting somewhere with Petunia, she had only carped once or twice. It could have gone so well if Vernon hadn't been Vernon.

Harry on his part had perked up considerably. He hadn't ever had anyone stand up to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia for him before, and it made him feel all warm inside. Besides he shrugged, he had gotten through the dinner with just two kicks and a shove. To him that was a successful meal with the Dursleys.

"Forget about the pudding, I want my money! That was the only reason I agreed to come down here. I was promised that you wouldn't try any of that... stuff! But thanks to my Dudders I came prepared!" Vernon fumed, his face turning red as he gathered his family behind him holding the rabbit's foot between them and the wizards like a shield. "Petunia told me that you were finally ready to talk sense."

"About that," Lily started to plead, "one of the reasons we invited you to supper was to ask for a little more time."

"You've had all the time I going to give you." Vernon said hustling his family towards the door. "One more day. That's it. Dudley! Petunia! We're leaving."

"But Daddy! I want pudding!" Dudley whined.

"I'll make you some popkin." Petunia said dragging him out.

"But you always burn it!" he protested.

"Don't fret Dudders, we'll soon have our cook back, and you can have him make you all the puddings you want." Vernon could be heard saying as he ascended the stairs.

"Filthy blighters." James growled under his breath as he slammed the door behind them.

"What was that all about?" Remus turned to his friends puzzled. "I thought I had walked into a very bad play. I've never known you to just sit and take insults like that, either one of you."

“Harry? Could you take Holly into your room while your father and I talk to Remus?” Lily asked lifting her out of her highchair and handing her to Harry along with a jar of baby food and a spoon. “She’d probably like a little more to eat, I got a bit preoccupied.”

“Okay Mummy.” Harry said agreeably, toting her off crooning in her ear about feeding her ‘smunched nanners’. He was in a much better mood now that the upstairs relatives were again upstairs.

“Smunched nanners.” Remus repeated softly, sitting down suddenly on the couch as if his legs could no longer hold him up.

“What that?” James asked.

“Smunched nanners – bananas.” Remus clarified. “That’s what Sirius used to call them all the time – smunched nanners. I just hadn’t heard them called that in years and it startled me. Harry must have picked it up from you,” he said shaking the déjà vu feeling off. “But back to the Dursleys... what did Vernon mean by ‘only one more day’?”

“Where to start...” James said sitting down heavily next to his friend and holding his head in his hands. Now that Vernon was out of his sight and his temper was cooling, he realized the damage he’d just done by tossing him out on his ear.

“Here, have some ice cream.” Lily said handing them both a dish of the cold confection. “It’s chocolate. It’ll help you think,” she urged. “I already took some into Harry and checked on him. He seems to be handling it okay. He’s a little quieter than normal, but okay.”

“Thought you said we didn’t have any pudding?” James asked quizzically quirking an eyebrow at her.

“No, all I said was that I didn’t have any for Dudley. He ate Harry’s potato. I figured he didn’t need any more to eat, so I gave his share to Harry.” She said smugly licking her spoon before asking, “So... my plan didn’t work. What do we do now?”

“That was a plan?” Remus raised his eyebrows incredulous.

“Okay so not a very good one,” Lily admitted. “But we had to do something. You were still recovering and we were running out of time. Vernon gave us a deadline to get him the money, and I was hoping to sweet talk him into an extension.”

“Ah... the one more day.” Remus said with understanding. “So we still have tomorrow?”

“Yes. Vernon said if we don’t get him the money by Saturday morning, he’s going to report us to the constables for kidnapping, and then he’s going to take Harry back.”

“What about Holly?”

“He said they’d take her away from us for being criminals, and put her in a foster home.”

“And how was he going to explain, knowing where Harry was all this time, and not saying anything until now?”

“He got that figured out, he said he would tell them we’ve been holding him for ransom, and that we threatened to do him bodily harm if he went to the police. He has his burned house as ‘proof’ of my violence. Then he got a couple of shouting matches with me on tape and manipulated them to sound like I was the one demanding money and threatening him instead of the other way around. They’re pretty good too, if I didn’t know better listening to them I would assume he was the innocent party and was only looking out for Harry’s welfare.”

“Are you sure he’s a muggle?”

“Very sure. Why?”

“Seems like he’d have fit nicely into the Death Eater’s camp.”

“Ha! He’d probably have them for breakfast. He may sound and act stupid, but he is really a very shrewd man, especially where money is concerned.”

“So it sounds to me that our next move would be to move up the Gringott’s plan.” Remus surmised correctly. “Why didn’t you tell me before? We don’t have much time left.”

“I tried to,” James said taking a folded sheet of old parchment out of his pocket, “I got the authorization letter all written for you, but every time I saw you outside and went to talk to you about it, you were always gone before I got there.”

“But I haven’t been anywhere.” Remus denied taking the letter and reading it with approval. “I didn’t have much wolfsbane potion left so I only took half doses. The result was that this month was really hard on me. I’ve been sleeping for days.”

“Are you sure you’re up to it then?” Lily said worriedly. “It’s taking a big risk. You don’t have to do it you know.”

“Yes I do Lily. I’m a part of this family too... aren’t I?”

“Absolutely!”

“Then I’m going to have to be up to it.” Remus said with determination refolding the letter and putting it in his pocket. “I’ll leave tonight. I don’t have quite enough energy for apparating, so I’ll fly - if you don’t mind lending me your broom James. I had to sell mine quite a while ago to get money for more potion.”

“Anything you want Remus... but be careful, it’s kind of old and a bit singed. Sirius pulled it out of the cottage when he saved me, and left it at the Sanatorium. I remember the muggle nurses all being quite puzzled as to why. I think they assumed I did some sort of manual labor, and used it to actually sweep with.” James said with a laugh, “It’s funny how close they were to the truth, because now I stock shelves and push a broom at the grocery.”

“Not for long James,” Remus said standing and taking the broom from the corner. “I’ll be back with your gold tomorrow. Wish me luck?”

“I’ve got something better!” James said jumping up.

Lily gave him a kiss on the cheek for luck, while James ran into their bedroom.

“Lily! Where’s my jumper?”

“What jumper?”

“The one you knit me for my birthday next week. You know, the one you’ve been hiding in the bottom drawer. The box is there but it’s empty.”

“James! You peeked?”

“Well didn’t I warn you not to leave me alone with a box tied up with a bow? I can’t resist it. But now I can’t find it...” James said coming back empty handed.

“That’s okay James. I don’t need your birthday jumper. But why did you want me to have it?”

“It was a very special lucky jumper for him to wear when he played Quidditch when we go back,” Lily said answering for him. “I know how much he used to like to play and I know how much I didn’t like him to get hurt, so I put a different charms on each color of yarn, red for vitality, orange for creativity, yellow for wisdom, green for health, blue for understanding, and purple was so that he would always come back to me in one piece.”

“It sounds very lucky, and I’m honored you would even think to loan it to me James. Thanks, that’s all I need.” Remus said giving him a hug and then taking the broom he took off into the night sky.

“Good luck Remus...” their voices trailed after him.

“Still want to know where my jumper is.” James said watching him fly away.

“Probably the same place as the sofa pillow and blanket. I think I saw them under Harry’s bed. Maybe he just wanted it as a security

blanket. C'mon... my ice cream is melting." Lily said pulling him back inside.

Friday morning Harry feverishly finished what he hoped was his final essay. He has gotten so upset the night before that he had forgotten to do it. But thankfully, he was down to just one inch and that was only one sentence, and he already knew what to write for it.

"So Mister... 'Krueger'... are we about done?" Mr. Nathraichean asked impatiently drumming his long fingers on his desk as Harry scribbled the sentence down. "I should not even accept it, as the assignment was to bring it finished to class, but I cannot face another week of this."

So Cosmos was right! Harry grinned and handed him the sheet of paper. It was a relief to know his teacher was as tired of this project as he was. In fact, every day Mr. Nathraichean had looked more tired than he had the day before. Maybe that was another reason he was so grouchy.

Why Celebrating Saint Patrick's Day is Absurd by Harry Krueger

"This is a promising start." Mr. Nathraichean reluctantly praised.

"Thank you sir." Harry said politely trying not to get his hopes up that maybe something was finally going his way. He didn't exactly agree with what he wrote, but thanks to Cosmos lessons on psychology, he knew what the teacher wanted to read. He just prayed that Dudley and his gang would have the sense not to ask for any more Arts and Crafts projects. This one had about done him in, but with his luck, or rather lack of it, they would probably demand a project for Easter too.

Saint Patrick's Day is really in honor of a good kind monk who lived a long time ago, and who did lots of good kind things. But most people today just think it's a day to celebrate luck and drink lots of beer. And that is absurd.

"Finally, you have crafted a somewhat coherent sentence with which I cannot disagree." Mr. Nathraichean said with a note of satisfaction as

he returned to the front of the class. "Now does anyone have a desire to have any more... Arts and Crafts... projects? Hm? Anyone?"

The entire class froze and stared straight ahead.

"Thought not." Mr. Nathraichean said with even more satisfaction. Ah, it was wonderful feeling when he could teach a meaningful lesson. He almost started humming to himself as he started writing math equations on the blackboard.

Harry was just grateful the long tiring week was finally over, and once home he flopped down on his bed with a sigh of relief. He was looking forward to the weekend and playing with his dog. A dog who right now was demanding his attention with a wet nose pressed to his cheek.

"What is it Cosmos?" Harry asked brushing the nose away.

"You said you wanted to introduce me to your parents this weekend. If that's so, we still need to get your dad to say yes to a dog. I think one last time ought to do it."

"Are you sure about this?"

"Was I right about your teacher and what he wanted?"

"Yes"

"Then I'm right about this too." He said with confidence. "Okay here's the last one... now we already asked for something large, something with fangs, and something with horns ... so now we need something equally as large and dangerous but this time it should be a bird...Hm... bird... bird... bird... what's a dangerous vicious large bird... I know! This time ask him for a hippogriff! He probably won't know what it is unless he's into mythology, but that's okay, it's perfect!"

"You said that wrong."

"I did?"

“Yeah... even I know its pronounced hip-o-pot-a-mus. And they’re not birds. They can’t fly.”

“Ha ha! Well, just for kicks lets call it a hip-o-grif this time. Okay?”

“But he’ll think I’m a baby if I don’t say it right!”

“No he won’t.”

“Yes he will. He’ll laugh at me!”

“Pleeeeeaaaasseeeee? Just one tiny hippogriff?”

“I don’t know...” Harry hesitated.

“How about... if you do this one teensy tinesy favor... I’ll show you how to make his hair turn blue?”

“I already know how to do that.”

“You do?” he said admiringly. “Wasn’t sure if you knew that much about magic being raised by muggles and all, but I shouldn’t be surprised. After all, you are my boy! Now go ask him!”

“All right...” Harry sighed deeply knowing Cosmos was just going to keep prodding him until he did it.

“Daddy?”

“Yes Son?”

“Can I have a hip-o-gift?” he enunciated slowly.

“Did you say a... a ‘hippogriff’?”

Harry just heaved the heavy well practiced sigh, rolled his eyes, and nodded. At the pained look on his serious face, a smile started tugging at the corner of James’ mouth.

"I knew I was saying it wrong! Don't laugh!" Harry pouted.

"Believe me son, I am not laughing. But let me ask you this... do you know what a hippogriff is? Did Remus tell you about them?"

"...no..." Harry admitted reluctantly.

"Then why do you want one?"

"I don't..." Harry sighed again. He was getting much better at the sighing part than he was at the lying part.

"Then what is it you do want?"

"A dog..." he replied very softly.

"Did you find me one that can talk yet?" James asked jokingly and about choked when he heard an even softer 'yes' as a reply.

"You what? Where? How?" James started grilling Harry, until frightened by the verbal attack he flinched and backed away. Nothing good ever happened when adults got upset like that. Taking a deep breath James slowed down and in a calm voice apologized, "I'm sorry son. I didn't mean to scare you. I just got excited. You say you did find a dog that can talk?"

"...yes sir..." came the faint whisper. 'Daddy is upset! What did I do wrong? I thought a talking dog was okay...'

"And where is this dog now?" James asked urgently.

"... under... under my bed..."

"Oh... I see." James face fell as he remembered the toe-eating monsters Harry had also claimed to live under his bed. It must just be another play for his attention. He had been very tired lately from lack of sleep and had been working a lot of double shifts trying to raise the money for Vernon. Harry must be feeling neglected. "Come here son." James said making room for Harry to sit with him in his chair. "You know there really isn't a talking dog under your bed don't you?"

“Yes there is.” he timidly contradicted.

“And what does this dog look like? Is it big?” James asked still harboring a small hope that he was wrong and Harry really had somehow found Sirius alive, and that for some reason he wasn’t revealing himself to them.

“Er... not really... big... he’s more on the small size.” Harry evaded but justified his answer, because in comparison to the other pets he had asked for, Cosmos really was quite petite. And wasn’t that was the point of all the other requests? To make he seem small?

“So you’re telling me, if I go in there right now and look, I’ll find a small talking dog under your bed? No toe-eating monsters or rabid dust bunnies, but an honest to goodness talking dog?”

Harry just nodded and held his breath as James got up, and strode purposefully into his bedroom. Was daddy going to make Cosmos leave?

“Harry, come here.”

Reluctantly Harry did as he was told but only as far as the doorway, keeping well out of arms reach in case his dad was still mad.

James was down on his hands and knees reaching under the bed as far as he could. “See? There’s nothing here.”

Seeing the open window Harry knew exactly where Cosmos had gone. “He left.”

“Oh he did, did he?”

Harry nodded and said softly. “He doesn’t like it when it’s all angry and people get mad and yell.”

James looked at his little boy with fresh eyes. How could he have been so blind? He and Lily hadn’t been able to get much out of Harry about his treatment by his relatives, and according to Petunia and

Vernon, they had been nothing but loving, but he knew that wasn't the true story. Harry must be finally talking about himself, and projecting it onto this make-believe dog, as a safe way of revealing his own feelings. Harry must still be very insecure of them as parents he thought sadly. He had to admit, that he and Lily had been fighting a lot lately, their nerves stretched to the breaking point by the stress they were under trying to placate the Dursleys, and a new baby on top of that. That must be what all this dog business was about, Harry's need to feel loved and protected.

That settled it, if Harry needed a dog to feel safe and secure, than a dog is what he was going to have. Remus should be back today with the gold from Gringotts. They would pay off Vernon. Get his signature on the adoption papers, and leave. And the first stop they were going to make was at a kennel.

"How about we get you a real dog? One that everyone can see? When your Uncle Remmy gets back were leaving, ALL of us..." he clarified remembering how Harry had a fear of being left behind, "and then we'll go puppy shopping at the first kennel we find and you can have your pick." James offered expecting Harry to be overjoyed at the prospect of getting his heart's desire, so he was taken aback when instead Harry just bit his trembling lower lip and lowered his head before politely saying a very quiet, "No thank you sir."

Harry was heartbroken, he didn't want just any puppy - he wanted Cosmos. But even worse was that his daddy didn't believe him that Cosmos was real.

'Sir?' James thought dismayed starting to lose his patience, 'What happened to Daddy?' It seems he was damned if he did, and damned if he didn't. He needed time to think before he said something else wrong that would drive Harry even farther away.

"Son, maybe you should stay in your room, and think it over carefully before you decide." James said emphasizing the 'son'.

"Yes sir." Harry sighed as his father left the room, closing the door behind him. At a whine from the window, Harry looked up to see two big gray eyes pleading with him over the sill.

"I'm not talking to you." Harry said turning his back resolutely and refusing to budge as he heard a thud as the big dog jumped in and a cold nose prodded him from behind.

"No! Leave me alone. You made Daddy yell at me."

"But did he say 'yes' to a dog?" Cosmos asked quietly putting his hands on Harry shoulders and turning him around to face him.

"...yes..." Harry said reluctantly.

"Then why are you upset? Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Yes... no... yes I want a dog... but I don't want just any dog...I want you... and you left... why did you leave?" Harry cried throwing his arms around Cosmos waist and sobbing. "Now daddy doesn't believe me that I found a talking dog!"

"Oh kiddo... I'm sorry. I just didn't think it was a good idea for your dad to see me."

"Why not?" Harry asked tearfully.

"Well, as you might have noticed I'm not exactly a normal dog, and most dads object to sharing their wardrobe with the family pet." He answered wryly.

"But Daddy wouldn't mind!" Harry protested.

"Oh yes he would. Besides, don't you like being secret pals? Kind of fun isn't it?"

"But Holly knows about you, so you're not really secret." Harry said after some consideration.

"Ah yes, but Holly knows how to keep a confidence." Cosmos laughed, picking up the child in question from her crib, and googling her until she was squealing in delight.

“But Daddy said yes to a dog now, so I think Mummy and Daddy should know.” Harry persisted firmly. “Then you wouldn’t have to sleep under my bed. I’m going to go tell Daddy again and make him believe me, and I want you to STAY. RIGHT. HERE.”

“If you must.” Cosmos sighed, turning back into a dog as Harry started to leave the room. It wouldn’t do at all for the muggles to see him as a man, they’d probably have him arrested for breaking and entering, and who knew what else. That was something he couldn’t let happen, he had had his fill of prison.

Hearing voices in the living room, Harry paused at the door and opened it just barely wide enough to peer out with one eye. ‘Better check Daddy’s mood first,’ he thought. Uncle Remmy was back looking grim, and now both his Daddy and Mummy looked mad and unhappy. Maybe Cosmos was right and this wasn’t the best time to introduce him. They might take back their yes.

“It didn’t work. They took one look at the letter and turned it to ashes right in my hand.” Remus said pacing up and down.

“But it should have worked! Did he say why they wouldn’t honor it?” James pressed.

“Oh yes he did. He said that with you two being of the ‘presently deceased nature’, any access you granted prior to your deaths would have to be reconfirmed by the current trustee of your vaults. The only other person who has full access to your vaults, besides the trustee is ...”

“Harry?”

“Yes, Harry.”

“So... we’re still dead as far as they’re concerned.” James said starting to pace with Remus as he thought it through. “That’s actually a bit of a relief in an odd cosmic karma sort of way. Those little buggers always seemed to know everything first, so if they still think we’re dead, then so does everyone else, so right now, no one’s

looking for us. But that just leaves Harry with access... maybe we could send him with Re-..."

"Absolutely not! Harry is not going anywhere without me." Lily cut in firmly, "They may not be looking for us, but they are looking for him, and I am not willing to risk his life. They already burned down Petunia's house trying to kill him. The news reports of his being 'kidnapped' caused quite enough trouble. Just imagine what they would happen if he just miraculously reappeared? Besides you're forgetting, our executor. What about him?"

"Well first of all, he's dead. And, secondly even if he weren't, we don't know where he is, and thirdly, when he was convicted the ministry took away all his rights and named a replacement. So even if he wasn't dead, and we did know where to find him, he still wouldn't be able to get in." Remus reminded her.

"Who'd they name?" James asked with curiosity. "It should have been you."

"Maybe it would have been if I hadn't been so rash about burning that message." Remus sighed and sat down. "They named the headmaster."

"We'll we certainly can't go to him! Not until we know what side he's truly on."

"Do you have doubts?"

"After finding out he was the one that left Harry and then never checked up on him..."

"We're just guessing at that." Lily pointed out reasonably.

"And after finding out he just willy-nilly had an innocent man convicted without a trial..."

"Just guessing again that he was the one..."

"Maybe so, but until I know for sure what happened, he's not exactly on my trust-him-with-my-family list. Gods! I wish it had been anybody else, even Snape would have been better."

"I'm sorry," Remus apologized, "but it's too late now. So if you won't go to him..."

"Absolutely not!" James cut in.

"And you won't let Harry go..."

"Not in a million years!" Lily steadfastly refused.

"Then long story short... no gold."

"No gold. No signature." James added.

"No signature. No... no Harry. Vernon will take him back." Lily finished with a sob.

'...but I- I don't want to go back...' Harry's stomach clenched at the thought and he quietly shut the door and sat down on the bed with his head on his knees trying not to throw up.

"Scooch over." Cosmos said, coming out from under the bed and sitting down beside him. "So what's going on? You look a little green around the gillyweed."

"Daddy and Mummy couldn't get the money for Uncle Vernon. And now I can't have parents, or a baby sister, and I haf' to go back there."

"Go back where? And what does money have to do with who you live with and who your family is?"

"Go back to live in the cupboard. 'cause I legally belong to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia," he explained sadly. "Dudley says I'm only here 'on spec'. Daddy and Mummy were going to buy me from them, but unless they pay them a lot of money by tomorrow, Uncle Vernon says they can't keep me any longer. But Daddy and Mummy can't

afford me... and-and I – I don't want to go back..." he finished with a whisper so quiet that Cosmos had to bend close to hear.

"So you really like these 'parents' of yours, and you really want to stay with them?" Cosmos asked. "Because... you could always stay with me instead. I could take you somewhere your Aunt and Uncle will never find you."

"I love you Cosmos, but I love my mummy and daddy too! I don't want to leave them. I don't want to go back to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. They don't like me very much, because I'm a... a wizard."

"There is nothing wrong with being a wizard, and you are NOT going back. Not to anyone who would sell you in the first place. That just isn't right. So we'll just have to do something about it." Cosmos said with conviction, raising Harry's hopes, but only slightly.

"But what can we do? I don't have any money." Harry said desperately.

"Oh yes you do."

"I do?"

"Oodles. While these new parents of yours don't have any money, I'm quite certain that your real parents did not leave you penniless. It is just a matter of getting it."

Harry thought about it carefully, Uncle Remmy did say something about him being the only one with access, whatever that meant, and they were talking about money at the time, so maybe... maybe Cosmos was right, maybe it was real. "So how do I get it?"

"Let's see, it's already Friday afternoon... think... think... think..."

'...coo!...' Holly waved her hands and feet in the air. This discussion was getting way to serious sounding for her liking. She had been ignored long enough and now she wanted some attention. She wanted to play with her funny doggie-man! Grabbing hold of her

plushy block, she flung it out of her crib and whacked the funny doggie-man on the side of the head.

Cosmos rewarded her excellent aim by picking her up and cuddling her while idly rolling the brightly colored plushy block with his toes. Each side was a different color: purple, green, red, blue, yellow and orange. Rainbow colored. Rainbows... hm... how to get the gold out of Gringotts... rainbows... gold... Gringotts... rainbows... pot's of gold at the end of the rainbow... Gringotts at the end of the rainbow... Gringotts where all the gold was...

"Holly you're brilliant!" Cosmos said blowing kisses on her tummy and making her giggle and clutch her tiny hands. "But... ouch!... leggo the hair..."

"She is?" Harry asked curiously. He was of that unbiased opinion of his baby sister too, but why did Cosmos think so?

"She certainly is. And she just gave me the plan. First of all we need..." Cosmos started to plot and plan in earnest. He was in his element when it came to intrigue and scheming. Growing up as the son of one of the most conniving and manipulative couples the wizarding world had ever seen, his parent's might not have thought he was paying attention to their lessons on political machinations with his nonchalant attitude, but they would have been wrong. Oh so, very, very wrong.

It took Cosmos less time than he thought it would to convince Harry that going somewhere with him, even in dog form, was the same as going somewhere with an adult. The little boy's desperation, to not lose his recently gained family, played the deciding factor in his willingness to bend the rules his parents had given him for his safety. Harry knew it was up to him to save their family. His daddy and mummy, and even Uncle Remmy, had all tried and failed. He was the only one left.

After swearing Holly to secrecy and getting her wet baby kiss to seal the deal, Cosmos boosted Harry out the window leaving behind a pile of pillows plumped to look like a sleeping boy. A black haired baby doll of Holly's stuffed in at the last minute so the lump had a tuft of

messy hair showing. It would pass for Harry as long as the glance was only cursory. If nothing else, it would certainly buy them some time.

The ceaseless downpour had been replaced by a light but steady sprinkle as the duo made their way quickly down the empty rain washed street towards the play park. Just as they reached it, the sun suddenly burst forth through the rain clouds lighting up the sky with a brilliant double rainbow.

Looking skyward Cosmos started chanting:

"Double the rainbow
Double the luck
'Tis the time
Your bargain's stuck"

"What's that mean?" Harry asked cocking his head upward to take in the glorious sight.

"It means we'll be successful. A double rainbow at the beginning of a new adventure is an exceedingly lucky omen."

"Lucky?"

"Oh my yes, the luckiest of lucky charms."

"Mr. Nathraichean says there's no such thing as luck." Harry said dully.

"Well, we'll just have to set that git straight when we get back with our pot of gold won't we?"

"Pot of gold?"

"Yes, at the end of the rainbow, there is always a pot of gold. You just have to be lucky enough to get there before it disappears, or in our case before the bank closes."

"Are we going to be lucky enough?"

“Indubitably! What could be luckier than a boy with a dog?” Cosmos smirked. “You just have to follow Mr. Roy G. Biv, all the letters in the name stand for one of the colors so you can remember them in order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Of course, in our case we want to find them in the reverse order, since we’re at the end of the rainbow and we need to get to the beginning. Got that?”

“Got it. Mr. Roy G. Biv.” Harry affirmed.

“Now do you remember what I told you to do?”

“I think so, but do you really think it will work? It’s not a real wand and it’s all taped together. It’s just a toy one from the magic kit that Dudley swapped one of his computer games for with one of his friends. Aunt Petunia got mad when she saw it and broke it in half and then threw it away in the alley dust bin... and I- I found it...” Harry said doubtfully, twirling the little black stick with the white tip in his hand, maybe he should have mentioned to Cosmos that his Daddy and Mummy and Uncle Remmy all had real ones. Nah... wouldn’t have mattered, they wouldn’t have loaned theirs to him anyway. They keep telling him not to touch them.

“Maybe so, but we don’t have a real wand.” Cosmos replied, not really sure if he wanted to know why Harry was looking in alley dust bins to begin with. “But since you found that one, it’s your wand now, and since you are a wizard, that makes it a wizard’s wand. That should be good enough for our purposes. So all you have to do now is believe.”

“I believe... I believe...”

“That’s the spirit. Now if you start to forget where to go next just think about the poem I taught you. And remember I’ll be with you the whole way, and if anything happens, I’ll protect you, just stick with me whatever you do. Now for my part...” Cosmos sighed and muttered ‘...I really don’t want to do this...’ as he transformed into a dog and sat patiently while Harry affixed a homemade collar and leash around his neck.

‘A patchwork of colors bright
Follow it to end’s delight’

Harry was quite pleased with the collar. Over the past week on his way home from school, he had gathered bits of soft multicolored leather scrapes, from the bins behind the tannery building next to their flat. Then the next day at school had carefully cut them into long strips during recess. It was difficult to do, as all he had to accomplish that task was a pair of old safety scissors that the schools cook had loaned to him. Once that was done, he braided the rainbow patches together into a smooth circlet and hung a small tag from it that proclaimed him to be ‘My Dog’. It was a collar that any dog should be proud to wear. And he had made it with special care, thinking that since Cosmos seemed to have come from a very dark and sad place that he would like something bright and cheerful. But Cosmos was not just any dog, and it didn’t matter how bright and cheery it was colored, it was still a collar, and the minute it was in place, Cosmos started to panic.

‘...I hate this... I hate this... I hate this...’ Cosmos growled pawing at the collar, and biting at the leash. Watching the big dog work himself into frenzy, Harry swallowed back the disappointment that Cosmos didn’t like his gift.

“It’s okay, I promise to take it back off the minute we get back. But for now it has to stay on.” Harry assured him scratching behind his ears until he calmed down. “Remember, you said yourself that you can’t walk around without one in the city. People will think you’re a stray.”

‘...I know... I know... I know... but I still hate this... hate this... hate this...’

Stepping to the curb Harry reached out with his toy wand and prayed for the rush of air Cosmos told him to expect that would signal the arrival of the Night Bus. Even though he had watched his Uncle Remmy summon it once before it still came as a shock when it appeared out of thin air and with a screech of tires, the violently violet triple-decker bus swayed to a stop in front of him.

“It worked! It worked! It really worked!” Harry crowed and hugged the dog’s neck, and getting an ‘I told you so’ lick in return.

“Where to? Hey! What?” The bus driver called out as Cosmos, trailing the dangling leash behind him, bounded onto the bus to check it out. There were few riders this afternoon, it being too early for the commuting crowd, and the few riders that were there were all on the upper levels, leaving the lower level vacant except for the driver. This will do nicely, he thought with satisfaction, he couldn’t have planned it better himself. The rainbow was being true to its luck. When he came back and nodded his furry head, Harry took a deep breath and stepped onto the scary looking violet bus... the first color down his rainbow path.

“Er... I need to go to London sir...”

“Is that the Tower of London, London Bridge, the London Zoo, the Port of London...?”

“...the... the inn?”

“Be that the Park Inn, the Premier Inn, the Bayswater Inn, the Tudor Inn, the...?”

“...um...the Indigo Inn?” Harry said relieved that he knew what came next for it was the hardest color to remember.

“That’ll be five sickles... each,” he said looking down at the boy and the dog.

“I – I don’t have any sickles sir... but my dog – um... my dad said to just –just charge it to him.” Harry stammered out the lie awkwardly knowing he wasn’t good at it, and at a prodding nudge of the cold wet nose added, “...and – and he said to say he’d pay double if you took me there next.”

“And who might this dad be?”

“Er... Sn-snape?” his voice came out in a squeak under the stress.

“Severus Snape?” the driver’s eyes narrowed at the nodding black haired boy with the pale complexion, he looked like he could be related to the Hogwarts Potion’s Master. But something stuck him as odd. He could almost swear the boy’s dog was laughing at him. “What’s the dog name?”

“Roy... Mr. Roy G. Biv.” Harry answered.

“Odd name for a dog.” The driver replied but he nodded them on anyway, and took off at breakneck speed. He wasn’t about to turn down a doubled fare.

‘Onward now our journey’s set
On a bus of violet’

It seemed to Harry that he had just barely got himself and Cosmos settled on top of one of the four poster beds that lined the inside of the wildly weaving bus, when they came to a screeching halt in front of a rundown hotel. A crooked sign that hung precariously from one corner proclaimed that they had arrived at the Indigo Inn.

“You sure ‘bout this?” The driver asked Harry as he bravely stepped off the bus into the London drizzle.

‘A wild ride, off we go
To the Inn of Indigo’

“Yes sir. This is right.” Harry said with more confidence than he felt as Cosmos about pulled him over by straining on the leash.

“Wait a minute... Does Professor Snape know where you are?”

“Um... I gotta go!” Harry yelled and turned on his heels, running pell-mell with Cosmos into the dilapidated inn. Once inside Cosmos pulled him behind a large moth-eaten tapestry that looked as though it had been hung as an attempt to cover-up the mold encrusted walls. The smell was overpowering, and Harry was only too glad to leave the musty hiding place when he didn’t hear the footsteps of the bus driver following them.

Peeking out from behind the tapestry, Harry cautiously cased the lobby of the inn. There really wasn't much to see other than a few ratty chairs pulled up in front of a massive brick fireplace where a pathetic fire smoldered on the grate. Between them and the fireplace, was a staircase that ascended to the upper levels and the front desk, where the desk clerk, with his feet propped up on the counter, was snoring loudly with a racing form shading his eyes from the glare of the bare bulb dangling above his head. Harry motioned for Cosmos to lead the way and they tiptoed silently past the clerk, keeping low so as to not be seen above the level of the counter. Cosmos stopped in front of the built-in bookcase next to the fireplace. The dust covering the books on the shelves testified to the fact that no one had so much as thumbed through them for at least a century. Harry shook his head in disbelief that anyone had let it pile up so thick and heavy, if Aunt Petunia had been here she would have put him to work scrubbing down every surface until every speck of dust was gone and the lobby gleamed. He was glad she wasn't here. It would take him ages!

Impatient, Cosmos nosed past him, and pawed at the only book not covered in layers of ancient grime - the second book over on the third shelf from the bottom. It was a thin volume, bound in pale blue leather, with deep blue lettering down the spine entitling it "The Charms and Enchantments of the Blue Faeries of the Isle of Skye".

'There the path will show you true
If you dare to brave the blue'

The book was fixed to work as a lever, and when it fell forward there was a small audible 'click' that echoed through the empty lobby like a gunshot, startling the clerk who sat up with a start and blinked his overly large catlike eyes. Not finding that anyone of interest had entered his establishment, the clerk went back to his nap and immediately started snoring again. Breathing a sigh of relief, Harry and Cosmos peeked from behind the chair where they had taken cover and (more carefully this time) finished pulling on the book. Once it reached a forty five degree angle, the fireplace started to grind as the bricks re-arranged themselves into a small arched doorway. The intrepid pair hopped over the glowing embers and slipped through the archway before the fireplace bricks closed behind them, leaving them sealed in a narrow passageway. Except for the

intermittently placed sconces that danced with bluebell colored flames, the tunnel was almost pitch-black. Cosmos, sensing Harry's second thoughts about following the rainbow any further, started pulling him relentlessly by the leash, downward into the murky depths below street level.

At the end of the winding passageway a small set of rickety stairs led up to a dingy blue door, beyond which Harry found himself in what appeared to be the backroom of a very peculiar shop. From every nook and cranny, tiny luminescent eyes peered out of cages of all shapes and sizes. Harry couldn't quite make out what the creatures were that owned the eyes, other than their bright electric blue color, which was evident even in the dimness of the room. He had a bad feeling about this, and just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. But the door behind him had melted into the wall and Cosmos had wisely refused to tell him how to open it himself from this side. So as Cosmos wasn't doing it for him, Harry could only move forward towards the lighted outline of a second door on the far side of the storage room, which appeared to lead into the shop proper.

They were three quarters the way across the floor when Cosmos scratched at his collar and whined. When he did, it was as if the room itself held its breath while all the eyes blink in unison before erupting in a cacophony of chaos. As the creatures rattled their cages so hard that several toppled and broke open, Cosmos took off at a galloping lope, towing the stunned Harry behind him. Together they slid through the doorway and underneath a display cabinet of round balls of pink and purple fluff, just as the tall, thin, bespectacled shopkeeper with light brown hair and warm brown twinkling eyes, emerged from the front of the store and started shouting good naturedly at the insane creatures swinging from the lights in the backroom to 'behave or they would be on the supper menu' and he would never be 'foolish enough again to take on a load of Cornish pixies'.

As the shopkeeper tried to corral the pixies in the backroom, Harry raised up enough to take a closer look around. A sign over the register let him know he was in the establishment of one 'Duncan Octavias Curatoran, Purveyor of Fine Exotics: living, dead, and everything in-between. Open twenty- four- seven for your shopping convenience, or by appointment.' The front window of the shop was

crammed with stacks of cages, which held a variety of things, mostly living, while the along the walls were glass display cases from floor to ceiling that held parts of what seemed to be the same creatures, only mostly dead. Harry wondered if the benign looking pastel balls of fluff in the case above him were part of the living, dead, or in-between merchandise, when they erased all doubt as they suddenly moved en masse to devour a large spider that had unwittingly trespassed into their space.

‘...Pygmy Puffs – two knuts each...’ he read. These must be the rabid toe-eating dust bunnies his dad was talking about! No way did he want one of these as a pet! A dog was a gazillion times better!

“C’mon. Let’s get out of here.” Harry whispered in Cosmos’ ear and the pair crept out while the shopkeeper was still occupied out of sight by the rampaging pixies.

“Whew! That was close! I will never look at the color blue the same way.” Harry vowed as he huddled with his dog in a shallow recess of a stone wall. They had emerged from the shop at the very end of a narrow alley that wound past tall crooked buildings that were jammed so close together that not even a breeze could squeeze between them.

“R.O.Y.G.B... B is for blue... check... back up one... G... G is for green...”

‘The color next can be seen
In candles of fatal green’

As Harry chanted the rhyme, Cosmos nodded in agreement and with ears perked for the slightest sound, he started padding down the dingy alley. He kept glued to the wall with Harry following closely behind, holding tight to end of the leash. Harry knew this part of the rainbow was up to him, as in his dog form Cosmos was colorblind, seeing everything through a dog’s limited color spectrum, which while blue hues are quite visible, the colors from green through yellow and red all appear similar.

The alley had many twists and turns, with confusing side alleys that branched off in unexpected directions in unexpected places, so Harry had to keep a sharp eye out for the green shop window where Cosmos said he needed to turn next. Anytime there was the slightest movement in the alley, Cosmos pushed Harry into a recess, or behind or under something to conceal him, so it took a while to traverse its length unseen, the alley gradually widening as the shops lining it got larger. Harry's eyes grew as large as saucers as he came to a fork in the alley and saw a window full of bilious green poisonous candles. He had found the green! But which fork to take? What were the next lines of the poem? Oh yeah....

'Right first, but don't be mellow
Left next at eyes of yellow'

Harry shuddered when he thought of what was next on his list... giant spiders with yellow eyes. He didn't really mind spiders. He used to watch them catch flies in webs in his aunt's garden, but they were small. He didn't want to think about what meat the giant ones might find tasty. Ready to get this particular color behind him, he sprinted ahead of Cosmos, found the shop called 'The Wiccan Web' and turned left past it as quickly as he could, but he couldn't shake the feeling that the yellow eyes were still following him, as if they had spied their next meal, and he was it.

Cosmos loped after him woofing for him to wait. They needed to be careful! Cosmos was determined to protect his precious charge, so when Harry, who had slowed to a trot and was gawking over his shoulder at a window boasting shrunken heads, ran smack into the back of the taller of two aristocratic wizards exiting a shop called Borgin and Burkes, Cosmos caught hold of his jumper and pulled him roughly backwards into the shadows of the mercantile before the man had a chance to recover his balance. The platinum blond wizard, annoyed at the rude disruption to his day, found a target upon which to expel his anger in the form of a diminutive creature with huge round eyes and bat like ears.

"Don't ever touch me Dobby! And watch where you're going." he growled and knocked the little creature to the ground with his silver tipped cane. "Let that be a lesson to you. Come Draco." And with a

flourish of his robes, he strode quickly away from the shop, followed by the smaller version of himself who imitated the flourish and swagger to a tee. The little creature got up from where he fell, locked eyes with Cosmos, winked conspiratorially, then ran to catch up to the tall wizard to follow submissively on his heels.

Cosmos crouched protectively over the prone Harry, growling deeply with teeth bared, until the wizards were out of sight.

“What was that?” Harry whispered urgently tugging at Cosmos’ collar to get his attention, until the dog stood down from his defensive stance and licked the boy’s face before letting him sit up.

‘...a friend...’ Cosmos thought fondly of the little house elf. He remembered many times in his youth when Dobby had taken the blame for his pranks to keep him out of trouble. Lucius Malfoy, the elf’s master, was a distant relative by marriage, and was no doubt up to nothing good at Borgin and Burkes, an establishment that specialized in curios of dark magic. The rumors that had flown around Azkaban at Christmas, had attributed the attack on Harry’s relatives to him, but for now, revenge was the least of Cosmos concerns. Getting Harry to Gringott’s before it closed however, was. And it was getting late. The sun was about to sink below the roofs of the building throwing Knockturn Alley into even deeper shadows than normal. That would mean Diagon Alley should be darkening as well. But that would be to their advantage.

Their next marker on the path was Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour, with its outdoor seating dotted by bright orange striped umbrellas. It was near the corner where Knockturn Alley met Diagon Alley. It was the perfect place to stop, take stock, and plot their next move. Cosmos’ loosely thrown together plan at this point, once they got to the main thoroughfare, was to hide Harry in plain sight. Who would pay attention to a boy and his dog eating ice cream?

‘Neath umbrellas of orange
We pause our path to arrange
Diversions to watch instead
While we pass the guards in red’

Pressing Harry between his body and the brick buildings, Cosmos herded him toward the corner across from the bank and to an outdoor table. Harry's jaw dropped open in awe and he sat down hard, as the gleaming snow white marble of the imposing looking bank building was lit up by the sun setting through a misty rain, causing the building to be crowned by the most vivid double rainbow he had ever seen. And at the base of the columns, a pair of scarlet clad sentries guarded an imposing set of bronze doors. Guards in red! This had to be it! They had found the end of the rainbow!

Because of the damp persistent rain and the lateness of the hour, Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour was practically deserted so a new customer got immediate attention.

"Hiya, son. Why don't you sit inside? Lot's warmer and a tad drier." The friendly waiter invited the soggy child whose wet hair was plastered down covering most of his face.

"Er... no thank you sir." Harry replied politely, getting ready to lie through his teeth. "I'm... uh... I'm meeting my dad and he said to wait outside."

"Ah, been shopping have you?"

"Um... yes... and my dad said if I got here first to go ahead and get something to eat and charge it to him."

"All righty-o, but you don't look familiar... who's tab does this go on?"

"Er... Snape... Severus Snape." Harry was proud he didn't stumble over it this time. He was getting quite proficient at lying.

"Wasn't aware the Professor had any children, thought he was a bachelor." The waiter said suspiciously.

'... hadn't thought of that...' Cosmos could have smacked himself '... stupid greasy git... never getting on with his life...'

"I'm... I'm adopted..." Harry said quietly and hung his head, but not before letting out one of his well practiced sighs and blinking real hard

until he squeeze out a tear to run noticeably down his cheek. His acting didn't work on his dad and mum but maybe it would on this waiter. "...recently." he tacked on wisely just to make sure there would be no more questions.

"Oh sorry, didn't mean to pry." The waiter hurriedly apologized for upsetting the lad. He could understand his angst, anyone being adopted by the exacting Potion's Master was apt to be distraught about it. He wasn't the friendliest fellow in the world. But he was a regular customer every Sunday morning for a large black coffee, extra bitter. Wouldn't do to tick him off, he was about the only one who could stomach the strong brew. "How about a couple of burgers then?"

"...and- and chips?" Harry asked hopefully. Cosmos liked chips.

"Sure, and chips. Since your dad's paying for it. Coming right up." The waiter said disappearing inside.

"What do we do now?" Harry whispered at Cosmos who was sitting under the table where it was dry.

Cosmos surveyed up and down the street. This was the sticky part of his plan. The rain was lucky and unlucky at the same time, it had chased all but the heartiest of possible witnesses inside, but the sparse crowd remaining did not leave much to work with to create their diversion.

"Here ya go." The waiter said returning with a plate containing two steaming hot burgers and a pile of golden chips. "Don't mean to rush you, but we're closing in about five."

"Okay," Harry replied amicably as he bit into one of the burgers and held the other under the table for Cosmos. He hadn't realized just how hungry following a rainbow could make a boy!

Between them, it took less than two minutes for the entire meal to vanish, and another minute for Cosmos to spy their opportunity. Lucius Malfoy and his son were just leaving Gringotts and up the pavement were coming an entire herd of ginger haired Weasleys!

While the two families were distantly related through a network of marriages, the Malfoys and Weasleys tended to get along like TNT and matches. It was perfect! They didn't need to make a diversion. It was going to make itself!

Sure enough less than sixty seconds later, a loud verbal altercation broke out on the polished steps of Gringotts drawing the scarlet coated guards from their positions to dispense with the ruckus.

'...wait for it... wait for it...'

Cosmos watched intently as the few remaining customers poured out the doors and added themselves to the crowd watching the fracas with interest.

'...NOW!...'

Cosmos pulled Harry across the street, up the steps, and through the doors. They made it unseen! Now for the gold...

With Cosmos' leash in hand, Harry timidly tiptoed across the small foyer and peeked through the silver doors into the central hall of Gringotts. The polished marble floor seems to go on forever and the counters impossibly high. On both sides, short odd looking men were hopping down off from their tall stools, closing ledgers, and locking doors as a clock chimed out six longs bongs, signaling the end of the banking day.

Harry's face fell. They were too late. The rush of adrenaline that had buoyed him up just seconds ago as they slipped past the guards, left him sagging hopelessly, as he slid down the wall and disintegrated into a sobbing heap of disappointed boy. Cosmos whined and licked at his face. Didn't he know this was part of the plan? As long as he got through the doors before they were locked, the Goblins would help him. And Cosmos had timed it that way to ensure that there would be no other customers in Gringott other than Harry, he just had to be brave and show them he was here.

Cosmos refused to let him quit and nudged at him until he got back up on his feet and wiped the tears out of his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Okay... but you better be right about this...” Harry said as he took a step forward, the sound, though small, seemed to echo for an eternity in the huge chamber getting louder with each ricochet. The goblins ceased their activities at once and peered as one down their long noses at the small human child and his dog, dripping on the pristine floors of their revered establishment. It seems they had one final client to serve.

The goblin nearest to the boy, who also appeared to be the oldest among them, motioned for him to come nearer, and when he did, the goblin scrutinized him carefully from head to toe and then signaled the others that he would dispense with whatever needed to be done, and that they could leave. As soon as the hall was completely empty, save for one boy, one dog, and one goblin, the goblin hopped down from his stool and moved slowly until he was in front of the obviously frightened boy.

“I am Bogrod.” The goblin introduced himself. “Of how may I be of service to you today Mr. Potter?”

“You – you know my name?” Harry asked startled.

“Of course. We have been expecting you for quite some time.”

“You – you have?”

“Yes. However we were not expecting Mr. Black to be accompanying you.”

“...w-who?”

“Mr. Black.” The goblin reiterated with a nod towards the boy’s dog.

“Oh that’s not his name! His name is ‘Mr. Roy G. Biv’ but I call him Cosmos. He’s my dog.” Harry said proudly patting him on the head,

whereupon the dog just wagged his tail and lolled his slobbery tongue comically at the little goblin.

“Indeed.” Bogrod said slowly looking down his long nose at the mutt. The dog shook himself all over, showering the goblin with leftover raindrops, and wagged his tail at Bogrod. He was hopeful that the goblin would honor his secret. He was risking a lot coming here. If the Aurors showed up and carted him back to Azkaban, Harry would be left defenseless in the middle of a world he didn’t fully understand. The Goblin, seeming to sense the sensitivity of the situation, addressed Cosmos asking, “I assume you are here to make a withdrawal then?”

“Yes sir, please if I may.” Harry answered politely thinking he was the one being asked.

“Do you have your key Mr. Potter?”

“Key?”

“Yes, your key.”

“...no... I don’t have a key... except for... except for this one.” He said taking off the key to their front door that he carried strung on a string around his neck, and held the large dull metal key out on the palm of his hand for the goblin to see. “Daddy gave it to me.”

Bogrod passed his hand once over the boy’s outstretched palm causing a small iridescent bubble to drift up and hover in the air above it. Bogrod touched the fragile bubble with a long yellow fingernail, and with a *pop* it disappeared.

“What was that?” Harry asked in amazement.

“There was a small tracking spell on your key that I dispensed of, can’t have that sort of thing in here can we? Client privacy rules and all. Don’t you agree sir? Unless... you want someone to know you’re here...”

“Oh no!” Harry breathed. His eyes round and unblinking at the thought of how mad his Dad would be if he tried to play his hide-and-seek game right now and then couldn’t find him.

“I thought as much.” Then with his long spindly fingers, the goblin reached out and plucked a small golden key from Harry’s still outstretched palm.

“Where did that come from?” Harry asked in awe, his eyes growing to the size of saucers.

“From your heart. A duplicate key can only be made by the rightful owner of the vault and only then from the purest of intentions.” The goblin replied cryptically before turning and walking slowly away with a “Follow me.”

‘...I knew they’d help!... and people say goblins have no souls...’ Cosmos thought smugly as he tucked his tail into the little cart and the trio set off down the long roller coaster path to the Potter vault.

Opening the vault Harry stepped in and his jaw dropped open. There were piles upon piles of little bronze, silver, and gold coins. But upon closer inspection, he started to tear up again. This was just play money! It wasn’t real. All this work for nothing...

“What is wrong Mr. Potter? Do you not find everything in order?” Bogrod asked with concern. The Potters were long time clients. It would not do to have them unhappy with Gringotts service.

“I- I needed some real money... real bad... and this is all-all phony.” Harry tried to explain.

“I can assure you it is quite real.” Bogrod replied and then taking a long look at the boy’s clothes he wisely guessed, “But perhaps you are in need of having it converted to muggle bills?”

“Oh yes! Please!” Harry said gratefully.

“How much do you desire?”

“...I-I don’t know... a- a lot?”

“Why don’t you tell me what you need it for, and perhaps I can help you decide the amount.” The goblin offered, disturbed by how distraught his client was becoming. Besides, if it would keep Mr. Black from trying to lick his hand every chance he got it would be well worth the effort. In any form, Sirius Black had always been irritating.

The goblin didn’t tower over Harry in height, as adults generally did, so he didn’t feel intimidated by him at all, and his offer, however businesslike it was intended, made Harry very relieved. So the normally shy boy started to pour his heart out. He told the goblin all about his Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. And about how his daddy and mummy needed money to buy him from them so they could be a family forever. He told him all about what Uncle Vernon had wanted, the house, the new cars, the pool, the vacation homes, and how his daddy and uncle had tried to get the money but couldn’t. And finally, he told him about how Cosmos had helped him follow the rainbow to his pot of gold, and about all the colors that he had found on the way.

“But there is one thing I don’t understand about the rainbow...” Harry finished, suddenly reticent about asking the question that had been bothering him ever since they sat down at Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour.

“And what is that?” Bogrod asked.

“Why are you wearing red coats?”

“What?”

“Red coats... I thought Leprechauns always wore green.” Harry asked innocently.

Bogrod was at a loss for words, ‘Leprechauns? He thinks were Leprechauns? Vile little Leprechauns!’ He was about to unleash a goblin’s wrath upon the boy’s unwitting head for the insult until he saw the naive look in his eyes. ‘The child is obviously undereducated in the workings of the magical world. May Gringott himself not strike me down for this...’ “...ahem... our green coats are at the cleaners.”

“Oh.” Harry smiled, happy to have the mystery solved. That made sense.

“I think I have a good understanding now of how much you need, so let us finish your transaction.” Bogrod said filling a bag with golden galleons before accompanying his client and his ‘dog’ back to the main hall where he exchanged the coins for a large stack of muggle money.

“This should be sufficient for your purposes sir. I exchanged it at the advantageous rate of five pounds to the galleon. If you would just sign here,” Bogrod said holding out a quill and waiting patiently while Harry carefully wrote his name in cursive lettering on the line.

“Thank you sir.” Harry said as he picked up the bills and started cramming them into the sack the coins had been in. “Can I ask you another question?”

“Yes you may.” The goblin replied, albeit a bit reluctantly this time considering the last question.

“You’re a Leprechaun and all, so I figure if anybody would really know you would,” Harry started in a round-a-bout way, “...my teacher, he says that there is no such thing as luck, and well... he’s a teacher so he should know... but my dog... he says there is... but then my uncle and aunt say magic and luck and all that is codswallop and hooey... but my other uncle said that isn’t true at all... and my daddy said he used to believe in luck but he doesn’t anymore... and my mummy said that was just sad that he didn’t... so is there?”

“Is there what?” Bogrod asked completely mystified by the little boy’s rambling question.

“Is there such a thing as luck?”

“Oh yes Mr. Potter, luck does exist. But the thing to remember about luck is that it fickle... it can go either way. Good or bad.”

“Then how can you be sure to have only good luck?”

“You can’t. If you put all your faith in luck itself, you just have to take your chances with the outcome. I find that putting your faith in your own abilities is the wiser path.”

That gave Harry a lot to think about as he and Cosmos retraced the rainbow path towards home, dodging a few loose pixies on the way. Maybe mixed into all those big words of Mr. Nathraichean’s, that was what he had said too. Maybe he owed him an apology.

It was past midnight when Cosmos licked Harry’s face frantically to wake the sleepy boy as the Night Bus came to a whiplash stop in front of the deserted play park. Tumbling off the bed, he rubbed his eyes, and stumbled to the front to offer the driver a bill from his sack.

“Nah... already charged your old man for the return trip... triple this time!” The driver laughed as he dumped the boy and dog on the curb and took off.

“Whoever this Snape man is, I hope he doesn’t get mad at me... oh well,” he said shrugging it off, “We better get home boy. It’s really really late! It’s tomorrow already! We need to get back before they noticed I left.” Harry picked up the sack and swinging it over his shoulder, he headed whistling down the pavement.

‘...do I care?... I think not!... Snivellus you best beware... or Padfoot will wash your hair... nah-na-na-nah-na... hahahahahahaha...’ Cosmos sing-songed in his head as he pranced along with head and tail head high, Harry skipping cheerfully beside him with his big bag of money. It was Saint Patrick’s Day, his thirtieth birthday, and he was a lucky, lucky dog! A lucky dog who owned a happy, happy boy!

‘Then back home we’re off to spend
Pots o’ gold from rainbow’s end’

As they approached the flat, Harry stopped dead in his tracks and grabbed a hold of Cosmos’ collar. The building was lit up from top to bottom and he could hear his Dad and Uncle Vernon shouting loudly from the top floor.

"I won't ask you again Vernon... .HE?"

"I don't know and it's not my fault you keep losing the little brat!"

"GIVE HIM BACK!"

"How many times do I have to tell you? '.HIM. Why don't you just do that thingamagiggy you did last time, and find him yourself?"

"Because it's not working!"

"Ha! All your freakish mumbo-jumbo isn't so great now is it?"

"...uh oh... I think Daddy noticed..."

"...woof... woof..."Cosmos said in agreement.

"Do you think it's too late to sneak in anyway?" Harry asked hopefully.

"...woof..." '...never hurts to try...' Cosmos thought optimistically leading the way around to the back of the building and stood under the window so Harry could step on his back as a ladder to gain entrance. As he jumped through the window himself, he decided it was best to stay in dog form for now, at least until the muggles calmed down. He had learned during his Hogwarts years that it was best to avoid rampaging out-of-control muggles and over protective fathers, both of which seem to currently describe Harry's 'daddy'.

After tumbling over the windowsill, Harry stood up and brushed himself off while Cosmos cleared the sill in one graceful leap. They were back, but boy! Was he in trouble! He knew that just by taking one quick look at his bed where 'pillow-Harry' had been unceremoniously dumped on the floor and the blankets left askew.

'...gool!... kama!...' Holly waved hallo from her crib '...you're back! And you brought my funny doggie-man!...'

"Hi Holly," Harry said picking her up and sat down cross-legged in the center of the rug with her. "I think I'm in trouble. What do you think?"

'...coo!... goo! goo!...' Holly gurgled. She was just glad her big brother was back. She didn't like it when he left for very long.

"You stay here with Cosmos Holly. And Cosmos you stay with Holly. I better get this over with." Harry sighed reluctantly standing up and squaring his shoulders. He hadn't heard Daddy this mad since Valentine's Day.

He opened the door a tiny bit, and with one eye to the crack, looked out into the living room. Mummy was crying on the sofa, Uncle Remmy was pacing a hole in the rug, and Daddy was stomping furiously in the front door.

SLAM!

Harry jumped as James stormed in and slammed the door behind him.

"The sot claims he doesn't know where he is."

"We heard. Are you ready to consider the possibility now that he left on his own? I don't think Vernon would have bothered to make his bed look like he was still in it. And neither would have a Death Eater..." Remus pointed out what James and Lily refused to acknowledge.

"But why would he run away? I thought he was ha-happy....." Lily started to snifle.

"He did run away once before, on Valentine's Day." Remus reminded her. "And it wasn't because he wasn't happy," he added gently, "it was because he thought you didn't have room for him."

"But we have the larger flat now!" James said angrily.

"We...we did tell him we didn't have room for a dog," Lily remembered guiltily.

"But I told him that we'd get him a puppy instead. That can't be it!"

"I'm not saying it is," Remus said trying to reason with him, "What I'm saying is that maybe he heard something else he misunderstood, like last time."

"But if not the dog...what else could it have been?" Lily hiccupped.

"We've been talking a lot lately about the money Vernon wants. Maybe..." Remus shrugged leaving the rest implied.

"But we never discussed that when he was in the room! He doesn't know anything about it!" James said, flatly denying the possibility.

"You're still too used to living in mansions with a lot of privacy. You may have the larger flat, but it's not that large, and it's definitely not soundproof. And little boys have very big ears."

"I can't even think! I just want to hex something! I don't understand how you can stand there being so calm and reasonable about this!" James demanded shooting hexes indiscriminately at inanimate objects to release his frustration. "I don't care what the reason is, he's still missing!"

"Is he? Are you sure about that?" Remus asked raising his eyebrows and nodding towards the cracked opened door where one brilliant green eye peered out.

"Young man! Get out here! NOW!" James thundered as the bedroom door slammed shut and locked.

"James! You've frightened him!" Lily admonished.

"No more than he frightened me!" James declared striding over to the door and pounding on it. "You've got to the count of three... 'Merlin! He's got me sounding just like my father.'"

"...one!" The door didn't budge.

"...two!" The door cracked open.

“...three!” A small body hurled itself at James and hugged him sobbing around the waist.

“I’m sorry Daddy... I’m s’rry... I’m s’rry... I’m s’rry.”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. It’s okay now.” James said picking him up, and sitting in the big wooden rocker with Harry in his arms, he started rubbing calming circles on his back. “I’m not mad at you. You’re in big trouble, but I’m not mad. I was just upset because your mummy was scared when we didn’t know where you were and we couldn’t find you. You must never EVER leave again without telling us.”

“I’m sorry Mummy.” Harry said quietly, his sobs turning into hiccups.

“Where did you go?” James questioned him, “You had your mummy and I so worried.”

“I was following the rainbow Daddy.”

“The rainbow?”

“Uh-huh,” Harry nodded.

“Why were you doing that son?”

“So I could find the Leprechauns.”

“Oh.” James said relieved, angry, and amused, all at the same time. Ha! So Remus was wrong. Harry hadn’t been worried about the money Vernon wanted. It wasn’t his fault this time. But that still begged the question... “And why were you looking for Leprechauns?”

“So I could ask them for a pot of gold,” he whispered back.

“Why did you want a pot of gold?”

“So you could buy me...”

“Buy you? We’re not buying you. You’re not for sale son...” James said confused.

"Please don't make me go back!" Harry said fling his arms fiercely around his Daddy and burying his head in his chest.

"But you're not going anywhere..."

"Yes I am! I heard you and Mummy talking. You said you needed gold for Uncle Vernon or he was going to take me back! I don't want to go back! I want to stay with you and Mummy! I wanted the gold so you could buy me and I could be your real son!"

So Remus was right, James thought kicking himself mentally, he should have been in Ravenclaw, the bloody know-it-all. "We would have never, ever, have let that happen. No matter what. Don't you know you are already our 'real' son? Nothing and nobody can change that. You're stuck with us."

"Not even Uncle Vernon?"

"Not even Vernon. He's just being more of an annoying pain and making things incredibly difficult, but even he can't change the fact that you are ours."

"For- forever?"

"Forever and ever." He said hugging him tightly.

"I guess you don't want the money then." Harry sighed deeply thinking again about all the work he'd gone through to get it, and the all the lies he had to tell. He sighed again, loudly. He was getting really good at sighing he thought with some satisfaction, all that practicing had paid off.

"Um... what money son?"

"The bag of money I got from the Leprechauns."

"I thought they had pots of gold." Remus chuckled correcting him.

“Oh they do! Lots of them. I saw stacks of them taller than me.” Harry said seriously. “But I had the Leprechaun exchange mine for muggle money because I knew Uncle Vernon would like it better.”

“You what?”

“I exchanged it. At the advantageous rate of five pounds to the galleon.” Harry quoted Bogrod while opening the sack of money he still had clutched in his hand and upending it over his head, he let the bills rain down. Breaking the stunned silence Harry finally asked, “Daddy, what’s ‘advantageous’?”

“Harry...? Son...? Where - where did you say you went again?”

“Like I said... to see the Leprechauns.”

“And where were these Leprechauns?”

“At the end of the rainbow.” Harry said patiently rolling his eyes. He was sure he’d already explained that.

“Okay... got that, but just where was the end of the rainbow?”

“Gringotts.”

“Gringotts? You went to Gringotts! In...in LONDON!” Lily gasped. “YOU. WENT. TO. LONDON. BY. YOURSELF?”

“...uh oh...” Now Mummy was mad at him.

“You could be lying in a ditch somewhere! You could have been kidnapped! You could have been killed!” Lily lectured him, just starting to warm up. “You promised me! You promised to never go anywhere without an adult with you! You are grounded!”

Harry looked back and forth from his mum to his dad with big pleading eyes.

"I'm not getting you out of this young one." James said still floored by the revelation, "But before she grounds you for life, explain more about Gringotts. Just how did you know how to get there?"

"Cosmos told me. And he went with me too. So I didn't go by myself." Harry said defensively. "Not really, he's kind of like an adult... sometimes..."

"And who is this kind-of-like-an-adult Cosmos?" Remus asked suspiciously. Whoever it was, it had to be a wizard to know about Gringotts. But who was it? And what was it he wanted with Harry?

"My dog..." Harry admitted.

"Your dog? The one you said could talk? James questioned.

"..uh-huh..." Harry nodded. "That's the one."

"He's real?" James asked to clarify.

"Just as real as the toe-eating dust bunnies... Daddy, I saw them! And you're wrong! A dog is much much better! Pleeeeaassssee can I keep him? He's not a puppy, but can I keep him anyway? Please? Please? Please? You said if he could talk, I could, and I won't ask for anything else ever again." Harry begged.

"And where is this Cosmos now?"

"Babysitting Holly." Harry said confidently. "She likes him too."

"Holly! My baby!" Lily gasped and started for the bedroom, when the door swung open a little wider and a cold wet nose followed by two large grey eyes all encased in a black furry face peeked around the corner.

Lily backed up a step at the sight. Even though he was practically a walking skeleton, he was still huge and dangerous looking, and he had her baby dangling from his sharp teeth in a blanket sling. Carrying the cooing baby, Cosmos walked with as much dignity and

aloofness he could muster into the center of the room and deposited her with care at Lily's feet.

'... don't mind me folks, I'm only here to get rid of the squirmy nuisance and then I'm out of here. I'm obviously not needed anymore since Harry isn't living with muggles after all. No, he's living with all you two-faced deserters that left me to rot in Azkaban. No, I'm not sticking around, no-siree-bob. Not me. No way. No how...'

'...goo... ga... kama!...' Holly cooed clutching at Cosmos with her tiny hands. Whereupon he promptly trotted back into the bedroom, returning with her pacifier which he dropped in her mouth.

'...well, the kid needed it!...' He defended his actions to himself. '...but now I'm out of here. I am NOT a babysitter... I have my pride...'

"Kama is what Holly calls Cosmos. She likes it when he looks after her in the middle of the night." Harry matter-of-factly informed the astonished adults who were all standing by this time, with their mouths hanging open, but making no sound. Harry then went over to sit by his reluctant dog, and throwing an arm over him asked, "...isn't he just perfect? Isn't he just the greatest dog in the whole wide world? So... can I keep him?"

'...hrumph! Keep ME? We already discussed this. What makes you think I want to be kept? While all of you sleep in your comfy warm beds and leave me to sleeping in alleys and with the dust bunnies. You've got to be kidding...'

"And he can talk! Really, he can! Can't you show them? Please show them?" Harry pleaded with Cosmos trying his best to convince his stunned parents not to throw his dog out of the flat.

'...there is no way on earth I'm going to transform back into human form in front of that bunch of traitors. What for? Just to have them jeer at me because I haven't had a decent shower or a shave in a week, and before that – not one for eight years? Not that a blasted one of them care a fig. Besides I'm wearing James' best jumper, he might object...'

'...kama!... kama!.... kama!...' Holly demanded of her funny doggie-man, she wanted him to pick her up! Why wasn't he picking her up? She was being her very cutest and he wasn't even paying any attention! Waving her arms and legs in the air and finally getting managing to get a hold of some of Cosmos fur in her tight little fists she grinned and chanted '...ah-be-o ka-ma!...' and used her baby magic to change Sirius against his will. Now that he had arms he could pick her up, she giggled gleefully.

"Why you little bugger!" Cosmos said prying her tiny fingers out of his hair. "See what you did?"

'...coo!... kama!' Holly gurgled happily at her funny doggie-man and held her arms out to him.

"Don't you try sweet talking me you little turncoat blabbermouth! You promised to keep my secret."

"Sirius?" Remus asked taking a step forward toward the emaciated man with the hollow sunken eyes. "Is that really you? You're alive? The dementors... we thought... they said you were dead..."

"Obviously you were slightly misinformed." Sirius sniffed, not mollified in the least.

"But how...?" James started.

"How what?" he barked back angrily. "How come I didn't just roll over and die for you? How come I protected your son, when you were too preoccupied to bother? How come ... How come... how come you never came for... me?" he finished in a pained whisper sinking down to his knees.

"Oh Sirius!" Lily cried rushing over to hug him. "We didn't know. Believe me we just didn't know. We were both in comas for so long from our injuries that we just didn't know what had happened to you. When you didn't come back to us, we first thought Voldemort had killed you..."

“That right,” James added moving behind him and putting his hands on his shaking shoulders. “We didn’t know what really happened until just a month ago when we found Remus again. When I found out that they convicted you ,and threw you in Azkaban, I tried to find a way to get you out, but all the newspaper reports I found said you had drown trying to escape. The dementors claimed they found your body and buried you in an unmarked grave. We thought we were too late. We would have never have left you in Azkaban. Never! We love you too much.”

“But... Remus? You knew I was innocent! I know you did. I told you. And yet you did nothing? For eight years?” he raised his grey accusatory eyes to meet Remus’ sorrow filled ones.

“They locked you up before I even knew you’d been arrested, and once you were in prison, they wouldn’t listen, and they wouldn’t let me talk to you. I knew the only way to clear you and get you out, was to find James and Lily alive somewhere so I went searching for them, but I couldn’t find them. I only found them by accident just last month. But by then, all the reports said you were already... gone.”

“But I told you where they were! Didn’t I? I’m sure I did...tell someone...” Sirius suddenly doubted himself as the scenes of that night started running through his head clearly for the first time in years. While in Azkaban, the dementors had forced him to relive them often, but he knew he was innocent and when his memories failed to feed their hunger for misery and despair, they substituted a version of their own, one in which he was responsible for killing his friends himself. But in the back of his mind, he knew the images were false, that was when he started transforming into his animagus form to escape their torment, and to try and salvage what little sanity he had left.

“No, you didn’t tell me.” Remus shook his head sadly. “I had no idea where to look.”

“Oh... my bad.” Sirius said in a serious understatement and then cracked a sheepish grin.

“Oh you!” Lily laughed and flung herself on him again, unmindful of his gaunt state, just glad they had found him, and that he was alive and well. Make that ‘not-so-well’ but she would take care of with lots of homemade chicken soup.

“By the way... nice jumper Padfoot, it goes well with your um... collar, quite the fashion statement. You ought to keep it.” James teased as he added his hug to the mix.

“YAY!” Does this mean I get to keep him? For my very own?” Harry squealed in the high pitch that only small prepubescent boys can reach. He had been holding his breath for a very long time.

“Well the tag does say ‘My Dog’, but if you don’t mind sharing, I think we would all like to keep him.” James replied pulling Harry into the group hug too as they surrounded the broken man with loving arms and started him on the path to healing. “Rainbow colored collar and all.”

Everything was perfect.

Their lost family member had been found.

And now that they had the money to buy off Vernon, they could return to wizarding world and straighten everything out. Everyone would soon know that he was innocent. Sirius was back where he belonged, and they were going to make sure he stayed there.

He would soon be a free man.

Sirius had come home.

~fin~